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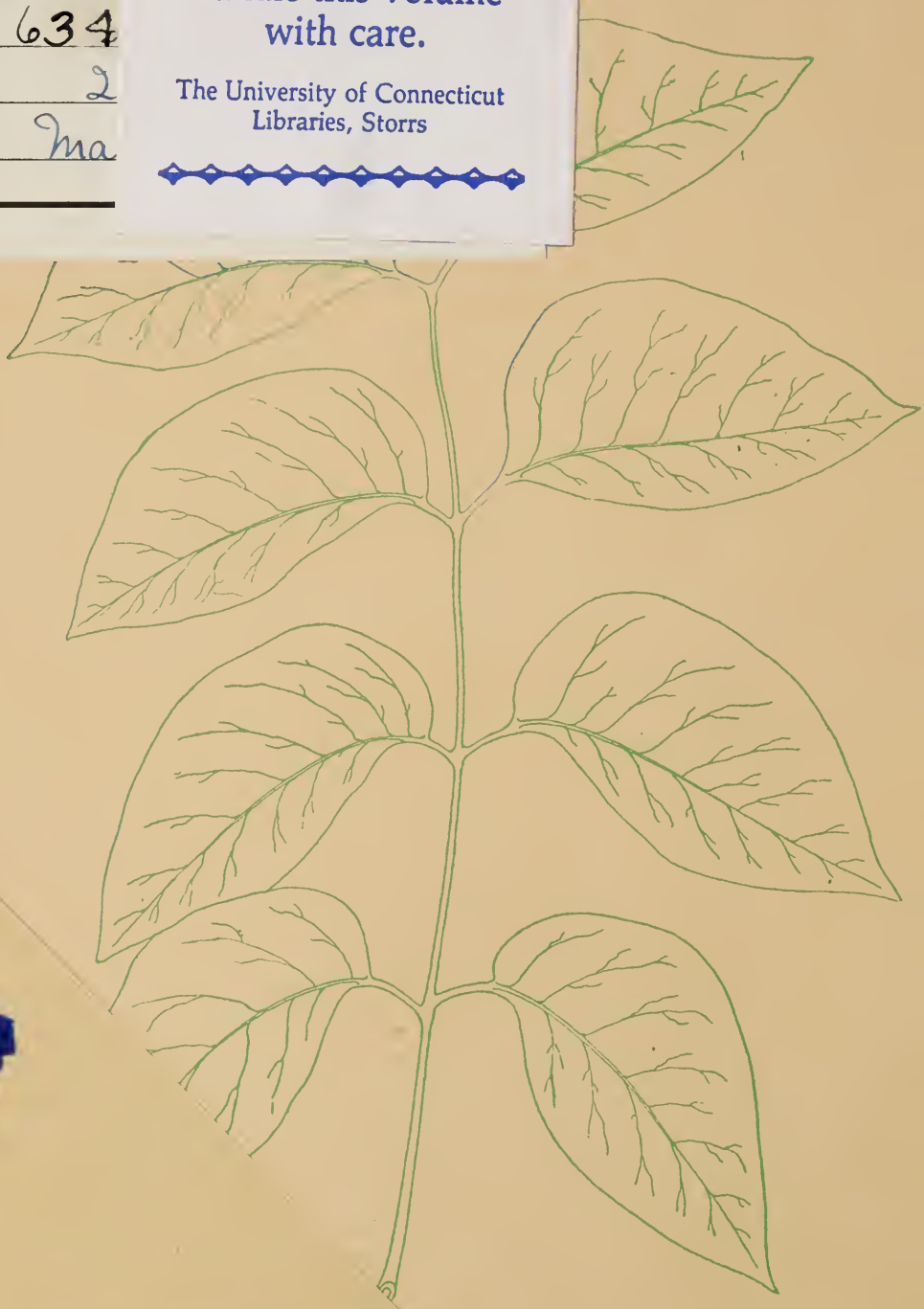
The Mahogany Tree

WALTER D. WILCOX

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CAOBA

(Cah-ó-bah)

THE MAHOGANY TREE

A TALE OF THE FOREST

INTERPRETED AND TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
BY
WALTER D. WILCOX, F.R.G.S.
AUTHOR OF "THE ROCKIES OF CANADA"

ILLUSTRATED

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1924

W64

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by
Walter D. Wilcox

19187



Made in the United States of America

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HOW THE STORY OF CAOBA WAS REVEALED BY THE FOREST

To those who love things of the outdoor world, forests have a sweet and soothing influence that appeals to one's inmost nature. What cheer and inspiration do maple trees and beeches give us, when, seated perhaps by some rippling stream, we hear the chatter of squirrels, the songs of birds and all those woodland melodies that proclaim little else than happiness! How wonderful it is, to look up through the tree tops, and see glistening oak leaves interlaced with the pine's slender needles against the sky! Are not the happiest days of childhood recalled, in all their glamor, as we hear the harsh cawing of a friendly crow, or see a hawk's shadow gliding silently over sunlit forest paths? Amid such surroundings we forget the world of toil and our soul is filled with peace. Every one of us, civilization itself indeed, owes a debt to the forests that can never be repaid. They are protectors of climates, guardians of fertility and moisture, no less than providers to us of fire and shelter.

But this is part only of the story. The imagina-

tion is stimulated by dark woods. Their mysteries strike a deeper note in the human mind than anything in nature. The bears and wolves and robbers, which, in our childhood fancy, the forests shelter; the elves, goblins and gnomes of fairyland, as well, have made an indelible picture in world literature and one that never loses charm as we grow older. Though the woods, especially of dark nights, may bring some feeling of fear, we ever love to revisit them. Forests have made the poets speak; their soaring and recurved boughs have suggested cathedral aisles and Gothic arches, and their bird-songs have inspired man with his first ideas of primitive music.

It has been the writer's good fortune to have enjoyed nature's rich offering of happiness and wonder in many kinds of forests; at times in the coniferous woods of Canada, as they sweep northwards to the Barren Lands, or as they rise above snow-line on the flanks of the Rockies; again, amid tropical splendors where palms wave their gleaming fronds in the trade winds, and the air is filled with flowery fragrance. The memory of each such contrast enhances the charm of the other.

One time, when the cold and frozen north was fast in the icy grasp of winter, I journeyed southward hundreds of leagues, by land and sea, and found myself in a tropical forest on the island of Cuba. So rapid had been the journey, and so great was the contrast between civilization's turmoil and the

solitude of those pathless and virgin woods, that the effect was unusually striking. After I had worked a difficult way for hours through vines and thorns of a dense underbrush, I came, by chance, upon a magnificent mahogany tree, the largest that I had ever seen. Though fatigued by my long walk in the tropical heat I was so deeply impressed by this tree's lonely majesty that I could not resist the temptation to spend a few moments by its side in silent admiration.

The dark trunk towered above the palms and underbrush and as I viewed the immense branches, almost lost to sight amid the foliage, I began to wonder how long this giant of the forest may have stood here, hidden in a wilderness into whose secrets no human eye had ever penetrated until this day. And then the thought came to me of what a story this tree might unfold! What a glorious and ennobling history it might tell to man, man forever toiling, forever suffering, forever too much engrossed in the struggle of mere existence to spend an hour of inspiration amid God's greatest wonders! Uplifted by such thoughts, I was more and more overcome with desire to learn these mighty secrets, and to tell that untold tale.

I was miles from home and the last rays of sunlight were now touching the tree tops. Unmindful of this circumstance I continued to dream of this glorious thing that had so deeply touched me. And then, though there was not the slightest breath of air, me-

thought the leaves stirred somewhat in the deepening shadows. It may have been some caprice of fancy; it may have been the mere creature of great longing; or was it, in very truth, a figure of more than human beauty that seemed to reveal itself before the half-disclosed trunk of the great tree? And this sweet sound! Was this the love song of some forest bird, or a dream-voice, mysterious and low, that softly spoke?

"Man-ape, why have you wandered so deeply into these hitherto untrodden forests where, for long ages, none of your kind has ventured till this day? Is it that you desire with all your heart to learn the story of Caoba, the mahogany tree?"

"I would rather know this secret than any the forest might disclose."

"Will you tell the story with faithfulness and truth if it shall be revealed?"

"Even to the utmost extent of my feeble power."

"What chatter of the man-ape do you best understand?"

"English."

"The hissing chatter. 'Tis well. This richest of tongues, founded on an ancient idiom and strengthened by the rough and virile words of the northern cave-man, is the language of a race which has struggled longest with the forces of nature, and one which most truly loves and understands her. Yet, for all its wealth of words and meaning, it is none too potent to carry the burden of my story. And now, O man-

ape, I must tell you that I am last and only survivor of Caoba, Monarch of the Forest, a tree that far excelled me in every way and whose history the Voices of the Forest repeat in awe and wonder to this very hour. Come hither at dawn, on the seventh day after the full moon, and the story of my illustrious ancestor will be unfolded to your astonished ears. Then shall the Spirit of Caoba reveal secrets of the forest of which you have never dreamed. But, if you fail the appointed day and hour, never again shall the Spirit speak, never more shall the tale be told."

I awoke as from sleep. The last traces of day had disappeared and the moon poured a faint light through the leaves as I bent my steps homeward. Footsore and worn, and with clothing torn by cruel thorns, I was dazed by this, I know not whether dream or vision. But inspiration had been born in my soul during that fateful moment, and neither fatigue of body nor weariness of mind could rob my heart of happiness.

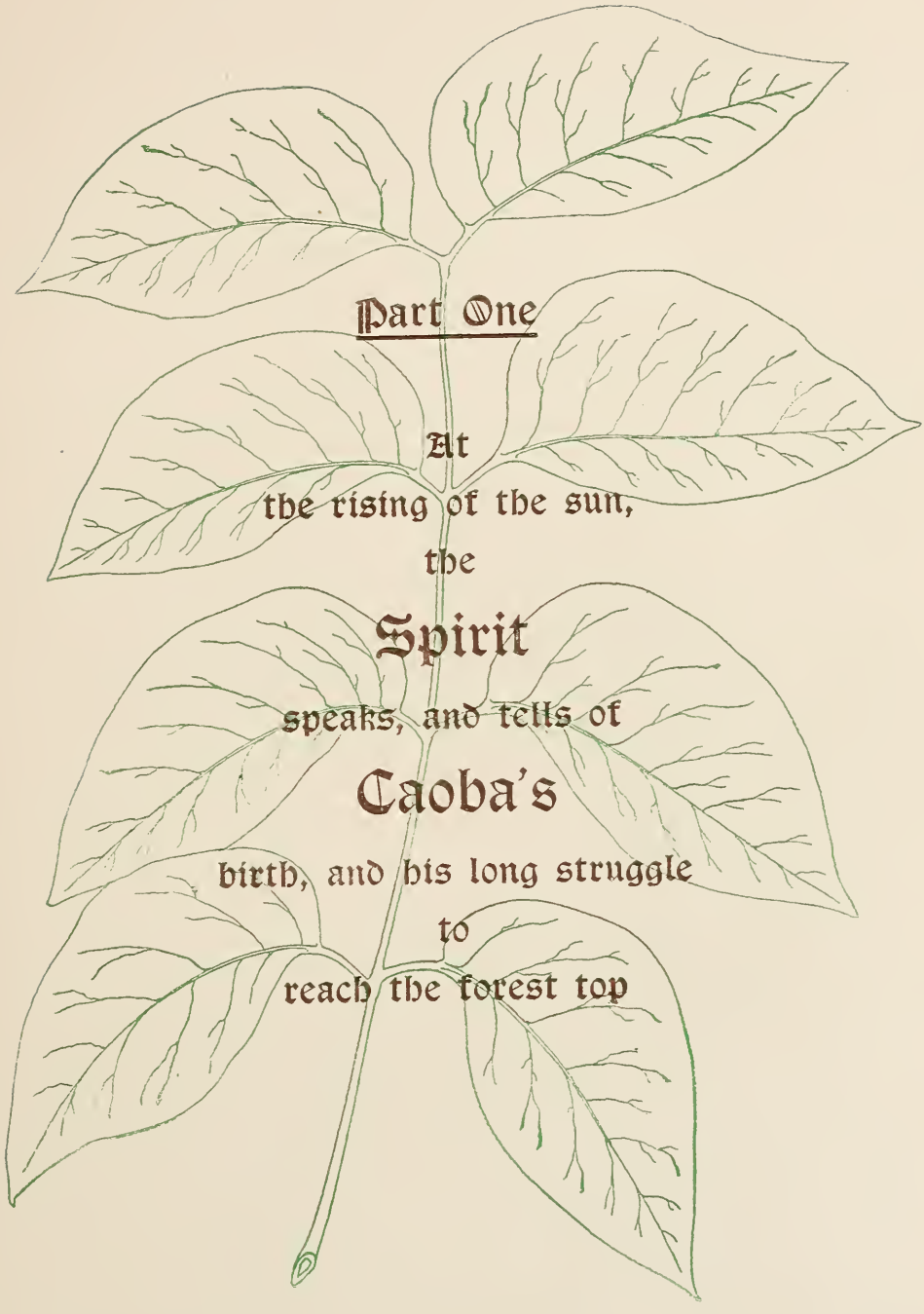
On the appointed day the first glow of dawn found me approaching, in half-fear and with beating heart, the scene of my recent strange adventure. Had it all been a dream and was I the pitiable victim of some absurd fancy? It seemed so, for daylight was already streaming through the trees, the scented calm of morning brooded over the cool forest, nor was there any evidence of that mysterious being which, as before, had half revealed itself to my

wondering eyes. Yet, as I looked up into the majestic crown and towering branches of the great tree, some faint and subtle inspiration seized me, ever growing more insistent. At length it seemed I heard a voice in which was recognized the low, mysterious quality of my dream-vision, a voice that floated through the woodland and melted into the daybreak music of the forest birds. And from this voice I heard the tale of Caoba, from the time of his birth, as a seed, through the many perils of his youth, till he became a splendid tree and a ruler of the wilderness. And I learned of the years spent in silent contemplation of the wonders round him till, at length, he was discovered by the man-ape and transported to far distant lands. So it came about, that from dawn till the end of day, unmindful of the sun's burning heat or showers of rain, and insensible of weariness, I noted down the story of Caoba's life. At twilight, the Spirit, invisible till now, for one moment partly disclosed its lovely form, whose nature I am sworn never to reveal. Then, amid the deepening shadows, it vanished forever, nor would it heed my call, or add another line, for all my pleading.

There was little time to gather up the now scattered, but all too precious, pages of my manuscript, before night fell on the dark and moonless forest. Alas! the first sharp and joyful triumph of having, by such rare chance, gained possession of this priceless story, was turned, upon the morrow, to despair as I realized that my notes were far from perfect.

I found great gaps in the narrative where the Spirit had spoken too rapidly for mind or hand to follow, and there were illegible places, where strange words appeared, or where, possibly, ideas too lofty or too sublime for the imagination of the man-ape, had been set forth in vain, to dull and uncomprehending ears. For years, however, I have struggled to decipher and translate this manuscript, and many times I wondered if it were not too great a task to attempt this history of a masterpiece of God, so remote from the experience of man that man himself could not understand it.

Yet, imperfect as the story was, I knew that there were scattered through it, here and there, at least a few thoughts faithfully recorded from the true voice of the woodland spirit, and I hoped its lapses might be overlooked for the sake of these alone. So, after long time of doubt, it seemed best to publish this tale of the wilderness, hoping that the reader might find, amid many pebbles and worthless stones, as it were, some nuggets of pure gold—wondrous secrets shall we call them?—from Caoba's inmost soul.



Part One

At
the rising of the sun,
the
Spirit
speaks, and tells of
Caoba's
birth, and his long struggle
to
reach the forest top

THE BIRTH OF CAOBA

Thunder . . . muffled and indistinct as from afar . . . soft sighing of wind . . . motion as of a cradle swaying to and fro . . . long intervals of reposeful calm. These first impressions of my childhood were dim and dreamlike, as fluttering shadows to one who sleeps, but sleeps not soundly. Memory pastels were they; like vague forms, seen through gauzy veils, or visions, half-lost in the mists of morning.

I was awaking. The thunder now made our dwelling-place to tremble and the patter of rain was clearly heard. The darkness was broken by a ray of light, as if a narrow window had opened, letting in a breath of air from the outer world. The Voices of the Forest spoke to us and said that we were seeds of one of the greatest trees. I was filled with pride and happiness. Like all my brother seeds, I, too, had the power to become Caoba, Caoba the mahogany tree, greatest and most admired of all the forest monarchs!

More and more light entered our seed-house, but, after a time, the faint rays turned rosy and melted into a deep purple that was almost black. A cooler

air surrounded us, a faint reflection from some unseen source silvered the edges of our window, and tiny points of light flashed out mysteriously and vanished as they passed the narrow portal.

The days that followed brought a marvellous change. The thick, hard roof of our little house had split into pointed segments and opened up like a star-shaped parasol, to whose central column we were all clinging. We were located on the highest branch of a tree that rose above the forest roof. We could look in every direction through leafy expanses, and see hundreds of other little houses like our own, as well as the tops of other trees far different from Caoba, our parent and father. The blue sky was flecked with clouds wafted in from the sea. Insects with transparent wings filled the air, gaudy butterflies fluttered in unsteady flight, while brightly colored birds darted from flower to flower and sipped their nectar. Far up in the dome of heaven winged creatures soared slowly and majestically. Below them we swayed to and fro in the south wind. All was life and motion; all was warmth and brilliance; all was utmost expression of highly developed creatures, born not yesterday nor yesteryear, but in far-off ages, untold millions of years ago.

In mid-afternoon the sunshine began to disappear behind ominous clouds, which pierced the sky, as if they were mountains gleaming with eternal snow. A heavy and humid air rested upon the forest. In the north, a long cloud-bank showed a ragged edge of

whirling scud, and seemed to roll up from the horizon as a curtain rising in some temple of the gods. Streams of fire preceded the thunder and a flock of birds, like evil genii rejoicing in the destructive powers of nature, formed the advance guard of the storm. Suddenly, a cold blast of wind made the forest shriek, and then the landscape was lost to view in torrential rain. So, for a time, the parched earth sucked moisture from the sky, while the plants and trees rejoiced and the affrighted birds shivered in piteous silence. At length the rain began to diminish, the storm swept out to sea and the setting sun's last rays tinged the clouds with a rosy glow.

Night descended on the dripping forest. The cool land-breeze was scented with the aroma of damp earth as the stars began to twinkle, and the moon shed her pale light upon the leaves and flowers of the wilderness. The storm, now far over the distant ocean, appeared a fairy palace, illumined from time to time by lightning flashes. Monstrous fireflies, flitting like will-o'-the-wisps through the shadows, the chirping of crickets, the sepulchral bark of the wild dog, or the shriek of some poor victim of Maha the boa, all proclaimed that the forest life, interrupted for a time, had resumed its onward, resistless movement. Under a clear sky the cold moonlight caressed the forest roof, making it gleam and shine, turning the pendant raindrops to diamonds, and, falling through the green leaves, transformed the reeking earth to silver.

THE FLIGHT OF CAOBA'S SEED

These first impressions of life in a tropical forest were a source of unending pleasure during the ensuing years. I was too young to thoroughly appreciate them. I say young, for I had never ventured forth from my house and home. To tell the truth, I was not quite sure that I had, as yet, been born.

A word about myself. A word that will disappoint those who do not know me well, but it should, and must be, told. I was, at this time, not a very pleasing personality. Hard, angular, long-winged, and filled with a bitter juice, I had no single attractive feature unless it were my rich, red-brown color. I was thoroughly selfish. I had not the slightest kindly feeling for my companion seeds, my own brothers, and would have willingly sacrificed any or all of them to advance my interests. For Caoba, my father, there was merely a sentiment of admiration because he was so big and so superior to all the other trees. There was also a certain pride that he knew how to do things so well; that he planted his seeds just at the beginning of the rainy season, and produced his flowers a little before that time, so they would have

an entire year for ripening. But, above all, I admired him for having provided us each with a wing, which, whirling round and round, would carry us far and wide on the summer breezes.

I thought this idea of wings, which made of us miniature parachutes, a very clever one of my parent. On the other hand the whole scheme of sowing the seeds seemed poorly organized and inefficient. It was marvellous, I must admit, but it did not work. For instance, so far as I could see, my view being somewhat cut off by branches and foliage, there were only two young mahogany trees that could have been attributed to father's parentage in all the space round his trunk for a hundred yards. Now, as there were at least three hundred seed-pods visible in his upper branches, probably containing as many seeds as did ours, say fifty, the total product for the year must have been about fifteen thousand. If my parent had done as well each season for the last hundred years, as is not unlikely, we have the astounding number of one million five hundred thousand seeds. When I calculated from all this that my chances of growing up were only about one out of, say, three quarters of a million, I felt somewhat depressed.

One learns very rapidly in the forest. Ideas come from everywhere. The Voices of the Forest are forever whispering, and exchanging thoughts, and it is just as though all creatures were constantly alert, armed as they are with a myriad eyes and ears.

Then, too, inherited tendencies, that mysterious power to do things without knowing why or how, are faithful guardians and excellent guides on the road to success. Even the migratory birds, resting in the trees after long flights over pathless seas, brought news of distant lands. So, all in all, the amount of information I picked up in those early days was truly surprising.

But there was one subject on which not even the Voices of the Forest were agreed, and that was as to the nature of the force or power which made trees grow, and blossom, and sow their seeds, as they did. Anyone could readily see, for instance, that two or three of Caoba's seeds, planted with care under some guiding *intelligence*, would have produced as many trees as he had brought forth with a century to work in and a million and a half seeds at his disposal. In reality, thousands of seeds never reach a suitable place in which to grow, while myriads rest on the thick layer of leaves with which the ground is covered and miserably die of drought and exposure. Even of those few which start to grow, the majority are soon destroyed by insects or other enemies. Some of the Voices of the Forest believe that nature is dominated by *law;* a law, however, so complicated as to be almost beyond comprehension, while others believe that everything is under the domination of *chance.* Few seem to know anything about Chance though some think he is a kind of god.

With my bringing up I was naturally a fatalist.

There is no use in worrying about things when the chances are a million to one against you. But it made not the slightest difference how I thought or felt about anything. I was absolutely at the mercy of fate; if it rained I got wet; if the sun shone I was dry; if something fell on me I got hurt. No utmost effort of the will, if I had possessed one, could have made me move a hair's breadth to avoid anything unpleasant. However, whether God, Nature or Chance, any or all of them, had guided my fate, I was the very best product that millions of years of experimenting had been able to bring forth and the *only* one in this world, or any other for that matter, capable of producing a mahogany tree. This idea was very consoling.

The sun and wind were again urging the forest to activity, and the air was filled with Caoba's seeds, floating like parachutes, amid his shining leaves. A ruder shock of the sea-breeze tore away the little fibre by which I was attached to the central stem, and, along with several of my brothers, I started on my earthward journey. At the very beginning of my flight, a fluttering butterfly crossed my path and a gentle touch of its wing—or was it a mere puff of air from it?—stopped my whirling, and dropped me amid a clump of ferns, on one of father's upper branches. All day I rested there, looking up at the yellow flowers and cheery faces of an orchid, which rose above me, and watching the insect visitors which were attracted by its color and honeyed sweetness.

The force of the sea-breeze died at sunset. Night fell, the stars appeared, and Terral, the land-breeze, blew softly. At dawn, a puff of air lifted me from the fern leaf and I floated to earth by the pale, thin light of the waning moon, which hung its crescent in the eastern sky. As measured in distance my journey was short but it required a century to undo it, and though my flight lasted but a few seconds, it was, in its unknown possibilities, an eternity.

A branch had fallen in a recent storm and had opened a hole in the leafy carpet of the forest floor. Into this I fell. Then, something even more remarkable occurred when, shortly afterwards, a deer, making its way through the trees, happened to tread on the edge of this tiny hole and covered me with a thin layer of moist earth. The god Chance was playing strange tricks. In a single day, through the light touch of a butterfly's wing, and the opportune passing of a deer, my chances of life were wonderfully improved. Last night they were a million to one against me. Now, perhaps, they were only ten thousand to one. As I thought of these things, I realized that I was the happiest creature in the forest.

CAOBA'S EARLY YOUTH

I now began to learn something of the forest floor which was to play so large a part in my life. It seems that this woodland rested on solid limestone, formed from shells and corals of an ancient sea. How long ago may it have been, when the emerald shallows, and sapphire depths, of those waters sparkled in the sunlight? What ages may have run their course since the varied forms of marine creatures, blue or red, green or yellow, leaping from the water, or darting among corals and swaying Neptune's cups, made those seas resplendent in rainbow colors? What untold generations of lowly creatures may have lived and died here, while building the shores of a continent?

These were secrets of an unknown past. Of those myriad forms of beauty and color, nothing remained now but flinty sea-shells and corals, broken up, mingled together and changed to limestone. The sea had retreated, but it is even yet not far away, and its salty arms penetrated the forest in lagoons and subterranean caverns. Over this stony floor was a covering of earth, a rich, black mold, the

accumulation of centuries of falling leaves, and fruits, and flowers, and even the bodies of insects that fed upon them. Where the limestone rises above this dark leaf-mold, the gnawing tooth of time has carved it into fantastic forms, sometimes perforated like fossil images of the marine plants that formerly carpeted these waters, or sharp-toothed as the cruel fangs of their former sea monsters.

To pierce this resisting stony layer, below the earth, was a great problem for a young tree. Who could tell but that some other tree had occupied the very ground in bygone years where I now found myself, and with wedge-like roots had bored deep into the wealth below? If so I was assured of life. Or who could tell but that a smooth and impenetrable surface lay below me, threatening a slow and tantalizing death? These were problems only to be solved by Chance, that strange god who demanded such a fearful toll of death from every dweller of the forest.

Lying in the earth, I had opportunity to think of these things, and make comparison with my primitive dreamlife. The darkness was just as profound as in those early days, and the sound of thunder likewise muffled, but there was no patter of rain on the foliage, and no swaying of branches. My awakening to the marvels of life, in the forest roof, and my subsequent experiences had given an entirely new aspect to everything.

The time was growing short in which I was to

ponder on these things. Moisture and the aroma of earth aroused new sensations and new desires. I felt an overwhelming and irresistible longing to reach up into the light and, at the same time, an equally strong impulse to penetrate still further the dark recesses below me. As I have already indicated, I was a mere child of fate, devoid of will power and incapable of moving, in the slightest degree, to avoid danger. Later in life I learned of plants that fold up their leaves and go to sleep at night and of others that seize insects and use them for food. I was not possessed of such remarkable attainments. But on the other hand, I was influenced by two opposing forces, and, what may seem strange for one incapable of motion, I soon satisfied both these contending impulses. In the warm rains, my outer shell had softened, and on the tenth day after my descent from the tree top, I put forth a little, white point, which turned downward, and another more slender, with two tips pressed closely together, which turned upward. Why each took these particular directions I do not know. Though I passed two centuries in the forest and saw wonders that seemed the very handiwork of God, I have never solved the mystery of why my root turned downward, where on every side was equal moisture, nor why my stem turned upward, where on every side was total darkness.

Without realizing it, I was entering the most critical part of my life. As a seed, I had been practically secure from all enemies, but now, as a germinating

plant, I had put forth tender shoots which might easily become the prey of the most insignificant insect. There are creatures in the woods that peer from their secret retreats, and, if no danger appears, venture out, ever alert, however, to dart back to safety on the approach of an enemy. In a way I was like such an animal, except that I had no power of retreat or escape. As vigilance was of no avail, nature had but one recourse, and that was haste. The sooner I arrived at appreciable size the better off I would be. My sharp-pointed stem had started upward on the tenth day after I had reached the earth, and on the twelfth, it pierced the ground and I looked out into the air and sunlight. A fallen leaf—how small it seemed in later life!—made an immense roof over me. My growth was so rapid, both upward of my stem and downward of my root, that I almost doubled in length every two days. The points of my stem opened out, changing from pale yellow to green, and became two oval leaves. In a few days another leaf, somewhat larger, appeared between them.

I was of course too young and inexperienced to make any criticism of how things were going on, but I could not understand, from outward appearance at least, what possible relationship I might have to a mahogany tree. Let me explain that father's leaves each had four or five pairs of leaflets on a central stem. My own single, oval leaves were quite different in every way. The fearful suspicion came to

me that I had not bred true to my parentage. I had heard that plants were sometimes cross-fertilized by bees or other insects, and had offspring that bore only a partial resemblance to their parents, which, living only for a generation, perished miserably as though nature had been cheated by their misdeeds.

Whether or no this were true in my case, I found little consolation in the next two or three leaves. The fifth was a deformed replica of the others only with a cleft on one side. The next had two such clefts, but I was surprised at the seventh, which was quite different. It had a single pair of leaflets, with one at the end between them, and so it seemed that the Caoba side of the family was manifesting itself a little, but not enough to remove suspicion. Now ensued a long period of rest in which I felt no desire to put forth new leaves though my roots were burrowing ever deeper. My head was now six inches high and my root had attained double that length. Some inner voice suggested that the rainy season would not last forever and that it would be well to go deep in search of moisture if I should not later die of thirst.

This long period of rest in which there was no visible change, was followed by a sudden transformation, a rebirth of power to grow, a rekindling of latent impulses, more wonderful than anything in my previous life. Then there appeared in my central axil, a cluster of rosy buds that rapidly unfolded and developed into three splendid, compound leaves,

each of which had three pairs of opposite leaflets, for all the world like those of Caoba my father! What a mighty load of depression and unhappy thoughts was swept away by this mysterious and gladdening event! My parentage had been vindicated and I was undeniably the true son of my father!

Little did I realize the real meaning of these leaves of different design. Nor did I attribute any importance to the fact that each leaf was a little higher in development and more perfect than the previous one, till, at length, Caoba's true leaves were achieved. Later in life the mystery was disclosed, and for years my heart was filled with shame to think that I, young and inexperienced as I was, had allowed myself to question an ancestry that dated back to the remote dawn of tree-life, when Caoba was a straggling bush. Nor did I take any account of Caoba's struggle with nature, through long ages, till his leaves became notched and split, so as to save themselves in heavy wind, till, finally, there were realized the perfect adaptations of the present day, indestructible in the burning heat of the tropical sun, unbreakable in the wildest hurricanes! Now that I read the story correctly, I saw that my own leaves told the history of Caoba from the dawn of life to the present day. Just as living creatures, when very young, develop from primitive forms and go through all the stages of their ancestral life, each one of my leaves may have represented a million years of progress. My callow criticism of this most marvellous of histories brought me

deep humiliation, and was a lesson, ever after, to be liberal in judging things I did not understand.

When my last set of three leaves had attained full size there ensued another period of rest and inactivity. Unconsciously I had come under the spell of that all-compelling and beautiful law of rhythm which controls nature; the heartbeats of living creatures, the ceaseless ebb and flow of tides, the changing seasons, the revolving earth, and the waxing and waning moon. Thenceforth rhythm was to be the measure of my progress; activity and growth, alternating with calm and rest, till the end of my life.

These thoughts may, perhaps, seem unusually advanced for one so young, but it must be remembered that they were thought out and recorded many years later. However, inspiring as they were, they did not, at the moment, occupy my mind in comparison with the idea of what a wonderful thing it was merely *to be*, a young, mahogany tree! I was now more than twelve inches high, and had a little crown of perfectly formed leaves which waved in the gentle air of the low forest, just as father's did far above me, and which glistened in some chance beam of light in feeble imitation of his greater glory. So I was filled with pride at the thought, that some day I might become as great and noble as father, and, like him, defy the hurricane, and become a resting-place for the wild birds of the wilderness. Potentially, it seemed, I was all that even now.

Elated with this hope, I was surprised, and not a little disturbed, to see a large, green worm descending a neighboring tree that was much taller than myself, and from which it had just stripped every leaf and bud. Upon reaching the ground, it turned its horned head and ravenous jaws in my direction, and began moving toward me with a horrid and fearful, undulatory motion. If there was ever terror in the heart of a young mahogany tree, it was right then and there. But at that very moment the god Chance, my protector, intervened, and put a new thought in the head of this awful apparition. Perhaps I appeared a rather pitiful morsel for a creature with an entire tree inside it, but in any case, with a contemptuous look at the Defier of Hurricanes, it turned and moved away to more promising fields.

CAOBA'S FOREST NEIGHBORS

At four years of age I stood more than six feet high and it must be confessed, that for one reason or another, I felt considerable pride in myself. Perhaps for a youngster, this was not altogether an unworthy feeling, especially as my well being was more the result of good luck than anything else. My stem was straight, smooth-barked and decorated with perfectly formed leaves. I noticed that they were arranged in a certain order and symmetry, each leaf being exactly above the fifth one below. My earliest and primitive leaves had fallen long ago, having served their purpose, and I observed with pleasure that the individuals of each succeeding group were larger and handsomer than those that went before. As a rule, each leaf had five pairs of leaflets, but among my very latest arrivals there was one remarkably fine example with *six pairs*, and, so far as I knew, even father had never surpassed this record.

Another source of satisfaction and contentment was the knowledge that many dangers of my early life were no longer to be feared. The Fire Demon might have been for me a serious if not fatal danger,

but I knew, from the Voices of the Forest, that there was no record of his having visited this part of the wilderness during the last many centuries. No one knew the home of the Fire Demon, nor whence he came, some thinking that he fell from heaven during the thunderstorms of early spring, others that he was a messenger from the dreaded man-ape.

Relieved of former anxieties, I now began to take a new and decided interest in my neighbors. There were more than forty different kinds of trees in my immediate neighborhood and it was not long before I knew the peculiarities of each and every one, and could tell all about their wood, their bark and foliage, and the kind of flowers they bore. Then, of course, from the Voices of the Forest I learned about many other kinds of trees in remote parts of the woods, some of which grew in the great swamp and were decorated with Spanish moss, while others, a league in the opposite direction, loved to dwell near the salt breath of the sea.

Though there were thousands of my own family in the forest, father and I were the only members of it that I could see in this particular spot. Within a few yards of me were three different trees who, naturally, were among my first acquaintances. Of these the most interesting was Yaya, the lancewood, to whom I was drawn by certain bonds of sympathy, as he was so neat and trim and had foliage very like my earliest leaves. Yaya was a small tree that never reached the forest top, his fate being to dwell forever

in deep shade. In a way Yaya was, in miniature, what Caoba must have been several million years ago. He had a heart of iron for all his small size, and no tree in the forest, except possibly Degame, had stronger and more resilient wood. Another neighbor was Almacigo, most abundant of all the trees. He was as different as it was possible to be, with his shining, papery bark, and white, spongy wood. He was always losing some of his branches, or falling down in the slightest wind. This seemed to make very little difference, as new shoots sprang up from his broken trunk, and even when a branch happened to fall, it was more likely than not to take root.

A young cedar, whose family name was *Cedrella odorata*, stood near me and if I ever had any feeling of jealousy, it was of her. Cedrella came from excellent ancestry, in fact she was a sort of second cousin of mine, and her parents are among the forest giants. Beyond that, little can be said in her favor. She seemed to have only one ambition, and that was to grow, and this she did so successfully that after a single warm night, no one could help but notice a considerable difference in her height. At the rate she was growing there would soon be no sunlight nor room for any of us, and then she would get old and fall down, and kill some of us before we had made a start. But I should hide my resentment a little, for a terrible thing happened to Cedrella. Presently a vine, with very pretty yellow flowers, and known as the Jairel, whose stem is little less than a living wire,

wound round the heart of Cedrella and held her so fast that her life current was cut off. Then her leaves turned yellow and she stopped growing and one day we all heaved a great sigh of relief when we saw that she was dead.

My own ambition, like that of my neighbors, was to reach up out of the eternal shade and get a place in the sunlight where I could look at the blue sky. It was a contest of powers only in so far as it meant life and death for each individual. There was no ill feeling against anyone so long as he did not cut off a little of our scanty sunlight or choke our roots in the dark, unseen mysteries, below the ground. As I review my early life it seems like a picture in which is seen a host of trees and plants, some of rapid, and others of very slow, growth, some dying untimely deaths from falling branches, wounds of bark or root, others victims of sudden and mysterious deaths to which the individual alone could attribute any cause. The survivors looked on in silent pity but there was always the feeling that each death meant more chance for those that remained.

The years passed as I slowly made my way towards the forest top. At twenty-five years old I was seven inches in diameter and stood thirty feet high. My bark was now so thick and rough that it was a complete protection from fire. Every wound of bird or insect was soon filled with a dark, red gum, which nature provided to heal and protect me. My sap, and in fact every part of me, was so bitter that,

generally speaking, I was left very much alone. The appearance of the forest had changed wonderfully since my youthful days, as many of my friends had died, and others had taken their places. Father was ageing rapidly also and it looked as though the end were near. It did not seem possible that he could live another fifty years. In a recent hurricane, one of his largest branches had fallen to the ground, and another, which was broken some years ago, was visibly decaying, while a nest of the Comejen or white termite showed that those destructive insects were gnawing at his vitals.

Owing to my increased height, I was now able to see, for the first time, a fine mahogany tree in the prime of life, who must have been an elder brother of mine, though it is very difficult to be quite sure of one's relatives in the forest. His black trunk made him look very distinguished among the other trees. He was about seventy-five years old and had reached the forest top. I mention these things, not so much from a natural pride in my own relations, as to introduce a blood-curdling event in the forest life, and one that might occur to me likewise, almost any time.

For years I had heard of the terrors of Jaguey the Strangler. He comes like a ghost in the night and from him there is no escape. His approach is the mark of death, and the very mystery of his origin adds horror to his coming. For this reason the forest, if it ever speaks of the Strangler, does so with bated breath. Jaguey begins as a vine and ends as one of

the forest giants towering over all but the greatest of them. His fig-like fruit is eaten by the birds, and their seeds are carried to other trees where they grow on such slight nourishment as they may find until their rope-like roots climb down and reach the ground.

So I was horrified, one day, to observe on an upper branch of the young Caoba a pair of large oval leaves quite different from those of the tree itself. It was Jaguey! Shortly after, a stringy root began to descend, giving off fibrous branchlets which crept over the bark. Meanwhile a network of thin roots began to criss-cross and wrap itself round the trunk. In the face of what seemed certain death its victim began a noble struggle for life. It was to be a fight to a finish between two powerful antagonists, a well developed tree of slow and almost irresistible growth on one side, and on the other, an insidious enemy of the vegetable world, endowed with almost inexhaustible vitality. But I must anticipate, and carry the story on, for a few years. The Jaguey soon sent up a towering crown of foliage that rose higher than the mahogany itself, while its large and elegant leaves, for it must be admitted that none in the forest are more shapely, shut out the sunlight from its host. Its central root had now become a sizeable tree in itself, and its offshoots formed a mass of rope-like cables round its victim. The pressure increased on all sides. But wherever the strangle-hold seemed most ready to cut off the life current, the young

My brother is seized by Jaguey the Strangler



Caoba, not waiting for the final death-grip, made a counter-attack by raising its bark into a swollen ridge, causing a pressure, so sudden and so powerful, that Jaguey's girdle was split wide open. The battle raged for several years, but it would carry the story too far to tell, at this time, the final outcome, and so, perhaps, it will be better to turn to more pleasant subjects.

It was now early April, and for several months no rain had fallen, except rare and unavailing showers. The sun shone with burning heat, the leaves hung lifeless and withered in the bare forest, while, each day, Virazon blew strong from the sea, sweeping inland its fleecy clouds. Yet for all the drought there was an air of anticipation amongst the trees. Almacigo was already beginning to put forth new leaves, the Roble was a mass of pink flowers, and the Baria and Domingita trees, glorious in their white garments, seemed almost like a glimpse of the far northland, under a covering of snow.

Like the other trees I, too, was beginning to feel the rush of spring. And now, for the first time, I observed buds in the axils of my leaves far different from any I had ever put forth. My heart was filled with pride in the happy anticipation of what this meant. Presently these new buds opened out into flowers, like little, white stars, in graceful panicles. So modest were they that none but the bees and nectar-loving insects observed them. I knew that many of our family blossomed at a much earlier age, for I

was now celebrating my twenty-fifth birthday, but on the other hand, I had heard, and in later life found it to be true of both plants and animals, that the highest types develop slowly, and only reach their maturity after years of preparation. I thought, or to speak the real truth, I hoped, that this principle might hold true with regard to individuals also. In any case I was thrilled at the realization of having arrived at maturity, in so far as the perpetuation of my species was concerned. Father was ageing and some day would come crashing to earth, while the nearest adult of our family was engaged in a death struggle with the Jaguey. If he were overcome, who would be left in all this neighborhood to uphold the family name? So, together with a certain pride, I also felt the responsibility of a young scion of a noble family going forth, as it were, on his honeymoon!

DENIZENS OF THE FOREST

So many things have occurred since I was born that I have failed, as yet, to make any mention of the moving creatures with which the forest abounded and which filled the air with music and the trees with life and color. These were the birds, animals and insects, some active during the day, others prowlers of the night, but every one of them different from the trees in that they were capable of motion. This power of motion was a great advantage and at the same time a great source of danger to the animals. In the ceaseless struggle for existence necessity demanded that the intended victim should be very alert, and move with extraordinary quickness, or else play dead, and not move at all.

The largest of the animals were the deer. No other denizen of the woodland had a higher place in my regard, because it was a deer that the god Chance had appointed to aid me, and by the tread of his foot bury me, in the rich earth, as a seed. Constantly alert for sights or sounds that might be signals of danger, neither the deer nor her helpless fawn had any real enemies in this wilderness unless it might be

the wild dog. But of all animals the wild dog, often scarred with the cruel blows of the man-ape, was the most forlorn and miserable. It was as if these poor refugees from a more powerful creature had wandered far into the most remote recesses of the wilderness, in search of a scanty and precarious life, rather than endure the cruelty of those who claim to be their friends. And it must have been far indeed that they had travelled, as there is no record during these last many centuries that the man-ape had ever visited this region. Yet the man-ape's other friend, the cat, a degenerate outcast, wild and suspicious in nature, also visits this woodland, its ears cut away by the man-ape so that, the rain falling in them, should drive it back to his lair. Aura, the strong-winged, who soars so far above the forest, and whose vision covers the great swamp and twenty leagues on every side, says that in the north there are evidences of the man-ape's dwellings. Moreover, in the dry season, the sky is often streaked with lines of smoke, and the air is scented with the odor of burning grass, and yet no denizen of forest or savannah uses fire except the man-ape.

It seems that the Cienaga, or great swamp, and the sea, are protecting barriers, on north and south, so that all our part of the forest has become a refuge for the wild birds and animals, destroyed elsewhere by the man-ape. For here abound countless thousands of winged creatures, beautiful beyond description. Here lives Macaw, the great parrot, and

Cotorra, his smaller cousin. Here, amidst the Jocuma trees, Cao, the crow, tells his brothers, and everyone else as well, where the best fruit is to be found, how far he can fly without tiring, and what a wonderful family he is rearing in yonder Sabicu. Here sits Tocoloro, the trogon, with his coat of jet and scarlet and his curious, three-pointed tail, while, far below him, Macao, the hermit-crab, scuffles through the dry leaves searching for a new shell, as the one he has begins to pinch him dreadfully. And far above the forest roof the strong fliers, on their way to and from the Cienaga, sail through the blue sky, Garza the white-plumed egret, the ruddy spoonbill, and the long-legged flamingo.

The most peculiar and best adapted to the forest life of the animals is Jutia, the tree-rat. He finds his food in the tree tops and he dearly loves the tender buds of Almacigo. But life is full of disappointments for Jutia, as the Almacigo has the smoothest and most slippery bark of any tree, and only when Vehuco the vine, or Jaguey the strangler, has wound about its trunk can he climb up and win his prize. Living so far above the ground Jutia seems safe from all enemies. But Maha, the boa, loves Jutia's tender flesh more than anything else in the forest and slowly winds up to where Jutia is feeding, and drives him terrified to the end of the topmost branch. Nearer and nearer comes his fearful enemy till there is hardly foothold on the slender and bending branch. It is a choice between Maha's gaping

jaws, and a fearful leap from tree top to ground, and Jutia can only choose the latter. In vain! Maha leaps also, and winds his deadly coils about his victim as he strikes the earth.

Jutia has a cousin which, though smaller, is far more crafty in self protection. Sometimes Maha makes a mistake, and tries the same trick on this relative, whose name is Carabali. As he maneuvers his intended victim into an apparently dangerous position, he does not note, perhaps, that Carabali is studying certain details below him. At length, with a squeak of pretended terror, Carabali jumps, and so does Maha. But this time there is a vast difference in the result! The crafty Carabali lands on a selected branch not far below, while Maha completes the unpleasant journey. Safe in the tree tops, Carabali laughs, and, no doubt, the Voices of the Forest join him, as he gazes at Maha, bruised, disconsolate, and hungry, on the ground below.

THE HURRICANE

Years passed in the ever-changing but changeless forest; changeless, in its green roof extending like a stormy sea to the horizon; ever changing, as to the individuals that supported it. In this ceaseless contest for sunlight, adding a foot to my height every year, I moved slowly towards the cherished goal of the clear sky. Through unforeseen accidents to neighboring trees, large spaces of blue would open above me, and I would gain more in the lucky chance of one such event than by years of patient waiting and struggle. Three fourths of a century had elapsed since, as a seed, I had floated gently to earth. Now I held my topmost branches level with all but the greatest forest giants. But every attainment in the forest is attended by new responsibilities and new chances of danger. That this was true I was to learn, very shortly, through fearful and perilous events that threatened the life of all but the strongest.

It was now the gloomy month of October, dreaded period of the tropical hurricane. For many days the sky had been veiled with thin cirrus clouds, and both the sun and moon had been adorned with mon-

strous and portentous halos. The accumulated heat of summer lay like a pall over land and sea. The rains had been very infrequent for the time of year, and it was a matter of common knowledge, among the forest folk, that when the summer's heat is allowed to escape little by little in showers of rain, there is less danger of violent and terrible hurricanes. Now, however, all the phenomena of sky and atmosphere clearly foretold the approach of destructive forces, which eventually proved among the most fearful in the memory of the forest.

There came a day when the sun was lost in a thickening veil, and the south wind began to bear misty clouds in from the sea. Dark and furrowed they were, and majestically they moved. Beneath them the pale scud, whirling and ghastly against the increasing gloom, seemed almost to touch the highest trees. Showers of rain were succeeded again and again by others, ever more heavy and violent than the one before. As the light of day faded behind the curtain of cloud, the forest began to moan, and soon became a pandemonium of flying branches and groaning trees.

The dark thunderstorms of June, with their violent squalls, their thunder and lightning, are severe trials for the forest, but they are short-lived, But the mighty hurricane is he who searches the very soul of the wilderness. He destroys not so much by the force of the gale as by the endless repetition of violent blasts. Borne on relentless winds, down-

pours of heavy rain add their burden to the straining trees, till at length the weaklings yield. As the hours wore on towards midnight, the gale increased, till it seemed that the forest could endure no more. Over and above the cracking of roots and branches there was a subdued and hollow murmur like some great creature writhing in agony. Strong of trunk, and with my upper branches not yet large enough to offer much resistance to the wind, I feared not that my own strength would be overpowered, but that some of my weaker neighbors should crash against me, and so make a burden of forces too great to be endured.

As for father, I felt sure that this night would be his last. For many years, I had observed the slow but certain decay of that sturdy old monarch of the forest, whom I proudly looked upon as my parent. With feelings of pain and regret, I had watched his gradual breaking up, through loss of branches, large and small, and moreover I realized that he, too, was subject to the inescapable laws of nature, and had reached the natural limit of life in his present environment. I noted that his roots were partly dead, and scarred by the telltale tunnels of the white termite. A scanty foliage adorned his mutilated branches, and every possible foothold on them was a resting place for clinging, parasitic plants. This ponderous mass of vegetation, made doubly heavy by the soaking rain, must have been a trying burden to carry on such a night. If then, as seemed likely, father had in

fact rounded out his years, it was not only natural but appropriate, that the end should come when the forces of nature were raging, and when the moaning and shrieking gale was playing the grandest and most heroic of funeral dirges.

Near midnight a sudden calm fell on the wilderness. The stars appeared, and twinkled amid curling wisps of scud urged hither and yon by unseen winds. Then, from out the darkness of night came a sound such as I had never before heard, yet a sound that seemed the offspring of infinite power penetrating all things near and far. Could this be the great Caribbean, lashed to fury in the gale, hurling its vast surges against a rockbound coast, riving the cliffs, and driving their ponderous ruins inland against the forest? Was this fearful sound, in very truth, the booming of vast billows, borne on the incoming tide and voicing their rage three, nay, four leagues distant? And these dull murmurs at my roots? these earth-borne and subterranean messages,—whence came they? What rude waves must be those that, through earth and air, can so far proclaim their mighty power! Hark! a voice, sustained and long, as of some oncoming wave from the sea! perhaps it *is* the sea, the green and envious sea, rushing inland to reclaim its long-lost empire from the usurping forest! Ages upon ages it ruled here, and sent forth its tides and waves to every nook and cranny of where now the forest stands, unruled by any other power than its own capricious will. And now,

perhaps, the sea, uplifted in the hollow hand of storm, raised to unwonted heights in the whirling hurricane, has come again to submerge these coasts of its ancient domain!

The stars disappear again amid the moving clouds. A puff of air shakes raindrops from the leaves. The mysterious sound now seems to extend from north to south, and every moment gains in power and dread terror. Yet the sea does not come. A roaring wave of wind and rain strikes the forest, this time from the west. And still the sea comes not. Nor ever shall—for this was not the sea, but the *voice* of the sea, borne on the wings of the hurricane! So the starlit calm, which rested for a moment over the forest, was indeed the very center of the hurricane. In this great vortex, the madly onrushing winds, sweeping for hundreds of miles over land and sea from every side, found a moment of peace. Now may God help the forest, for all those terrors, lived through before, must needs be borne again!

Many a noble monarch that had outlived the assaults of the south wind, succumbed to this new fury sweeping from the west towards the land of the dawn. And the dawn, wan and ghastly, through showers of cold and driving rain, came out of the east to meet the gale. In the faint light of daybreak, I saw the rugged form of Caoba, my father, outlined against the lurid sky, less scarred by the warring elements than many another proud giant of the forest, in the prime of life. And while the broken cloud-

rack, in long furrows from horizon to horizon, swept over him, it seemed not that the clouds were moving, but that they stood still, even as the foundations of the earth stood, and that it was *he* who moved through the clouds, as the gods themselves would walk, with majestic motion!

So, having conquered the fury of such a bedlam night I hoped that father might have had inherent vitality to live on through some years. But one cannot anticipate the revelations of the forest, nor its wonders, wonders that often are not to be explained. The turmoil of hurricane was followed by days of sunshine and calm. Not long after this fearful visitation, following a brilliant day, and a golden sunset, and when all but the nocturnal voices were hushed in the silence of night, I heard a moan, like the death-cry of some mighty creature, the snapping of fibres, the rush of air through branches, and a roar as of thunder. Then I knew that father, after two centuries of glorious life, had found his end in his own good time, and, in a night of perfect calm, had succumbed to all-conquering death while the stars looked on.

This portentous event filled me with gloomy forebodings. Now that all was over, I realized how great a part of my life had been his paternal shade, and the vast store of strength, with which his great branches had inspired and stimulated me. Yet the very head and leader of the family was gone. My elder brother, who had made such a courageous fight against the

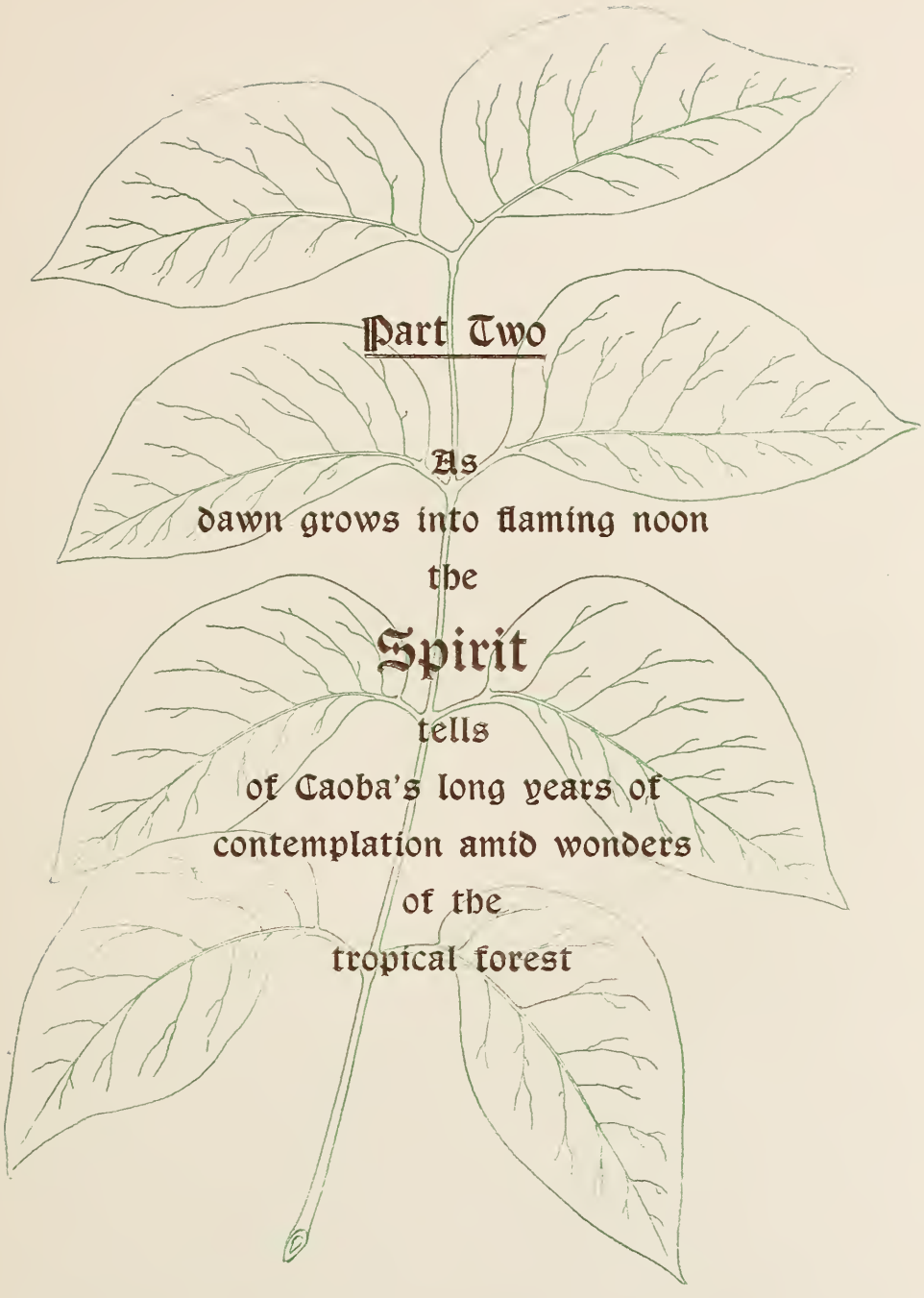
Jaguey, was long since dead, both he and his enemy having been killed by a stroke of lightning. I was now the last and only representative of our family in all that part of the forest. What still further filled my heart with alarm, was the fact that, though I had been scattering seeds over the forest floor for years, I could discover no single, young mahogany tree, to take my place. What if we should die out? Were we not able to hold our own against the inferior trees of the forest? And were they indeed inferior?

From such thoughts I looked back, and pondered over the mysterious chances that had guided my life from my first downward flight as a sailing seed, to the present moment. I realized that chance had been the guiding force of my every advance in life, and that to chance must be left not only my own destiny but that also of my offspring, should there be any. But, so fortunate had I been in the dispensation of favors from the god Chance, that, in the prime of youth, I found myself at the forest top, tall and straight, sound of heart, and strongly anchored with roots that grasped the coral rocks, and which would hold me fearless through the strongest gale.

The fall of my parent left a gap in the roof of the forest and my outlook was increased many fold. There was no longer need to continue upward. Yet, by the very force of long continued growth, and perhaps also through inherent nature, I eventually raised a crown of foliage considerably above the general level of the other trees. I could see to a

distance of a mile or more, and if I could only rise a yard or so further, it would be possible, perhaps, to look upon the great Cienaga, or even the distant sea, whose salt breath was borne over the forest by the south wind.

Thus the two great events that awoke me from a youth to an adult, and changed my whole course of thought, had occurred at the same time. I refer to father's death and my arrival at the forest top. These were historic milestones in my life, through which my range of vision, both mental and physical, was marvellously enlarged. I could now observe the full sweep of the sky from the rising to the setting sun, and so I had opportunity to admire the stars and clouds, and soaring birds, as I had never been able to do from the forest depths. Nor could I look on those silent points of light, moving tranquilly through the arched dome above, without a sense of their infinite mystery, overwhelming in meaning, and no less impossible of comprehension.



Part Two

As
dawn grows into flaming noon
the
Spirit
tells
of Caoba's long years of
contemplation amid wonders
of the
tropical forest

RUBYHEAD

Upon reaching the forest top I was filled with exultation. I felt that I had won a great victory and the fact that this victory was the result of a propitious fate, rather than of my own efforts, could not take away my happiness. Since the time when I was a mere seed in father's branches, a complete cycle had run its course. I now raised to the blue sky, even as father had done in the former days, hundreds of seed-pods which opened out like miniature parasols, and scattered the whirling seeds far and wide over the forest floor. Now, after my long period of struggle and effort, everything made a much deeper impression than in my childhood. Even as I glanced earthward, along my dark, columnar trunk, rising out of the forest shadows to dissolve into diverging branches and sun-bathed leaves, the distance down and through those airy depths looked far more awful than in my early days. I realized the dreadful destruction, with my present bulk and weight, that would ensue were I to fall. As a winged seed, the air had been, for me, little else than a soft cushion that would bear me to a new home. My former

flight to earth had been free from fear and danger, no less than if I had been an eagle's plume falling from the sky, or some star-rayed snow-flake drifting through winter's crystalline air.

Strange to say, in spite of the sunshine and joy around me, there came a momentary feeling of sadness and regret that there would be no further contest with nature's forces. Did this not mean the end of progress? It seemed as though I had been passing through some beautiful experience; as if I had been seeking to touch some distant rainbow, which from far-off places is so wonderful, only to discover, on coming near, that it vanished in dark cloud and mist. I have been told, times without number, that when the beams of the setting sun paint the showers, and, perchance, some forest bird flies straight towards Iris' arc, for this winged messenger alone, the glorious rainbow fades and the wind-blown drops, that just now were bright-hued gems, change to cold and colorless diamonds.

Fortunately, this lowness of spirit, born of ignorance, was short-lived. Under the cheering influences on every side, I soon realized that the life now opening up before me was to be as different from my period of strife as a day of sunny calm is different from a night of storm. Hitherto my efforts had been expended in reaching upward with the greatest possible speed. Henceforth my growth was to be entirely in thickness of trunk and upper branches. As these increased in size, there came, little by little, a

host of strange plants to visit me and perch amid my foliage. It was soon apparent that they had not come for a brief week-end but were planning to stay indefinitely. There was nothing particularly displeasing or inconvenient in their presence, but when I considered that they had no special claim on my hospitality, and only came to my house because it was large and comfortable, and had a fine exposure to sunlight, the situation did not seem very complimentary. Representatives of many different families, bromeliads, ferns, orchids and Spanish moss, which latter waved its long, gray festoons in the slightest breath of air, and even parasitic mistletoes, joined the self-invited party till, at length, they occupied every possible foothold.

There were other and more animated visitors such as parrots and paroquets, and, more rarely, the large and gorgeous macaws. Then there was Arriero, the great brown cuckoo, who flits so silently and calls so strangely as though he were reproving some forest dweller of misdeeds discovered, and little tody, cousin of the kingfisher, who makes a curious rattling sound as he whirrs among the trees. Most of the birds used my crown as a temporary resting place, but some here built their nests and raised their families. When I first reached the forest roof I began to learn the language of my intimate friends such as Cao, the crow, Cotorra the parrot, and Aura the buzzard who uses the sky for a resting place as he soars for hours on untiring wing. Cao has the most varied vocabu-

lary and it is said that his manner of talking very closely resembles the chatter of the man-ape. His voice is rough, but the forest loves him. His notes are most often heard on bright summer days and when Cao speaks it seems as though it were himself rather than the sun that filled the woodland with light and happiness.

One day Cao was sitting in a neighboring tree and not far away were several of his friends. Cao heard words that sounded something like this,—"Coor-r-eek, cooreek, wixy cooreek-e-o!" which seemed as much as to say,—"Come over here with us and don't be so unsociable!" Cao replied,—"Ka-ra-o'-ee," and flew over to join them. After some little chatter, a hawk sailed overhead, whereupon several voices, more strident than before, called out,—"Wicky-koo-ra'-o, o-koo'-ke-o." Then they left for another part of the forest so I thought they must have said, "Here comes old Gavilan, the forest bully and robber. Let's slip away to the Ocuje grove and avoid him." Thus, little by little, I began to pick up the language of the Voices of the Forest, nor was it long before I understood all they said.

The most charming of the forest life was little Rubyhead, the humming-bird. He it was who became my most intimate companion and friend. Amid Caoba's branches, as nowhere else, Rubyhead loved to sip the orchids' nectar, to catch the unwary insect and build his little home. Rubyhead is so small it is difficult to believe that he is a bird. Many insects

are larger. Avispa the wasp, who drones heavily through the summer air, her long legs hanging limp, in search of the hairy tarantula, that she may sting him to drowsiness and lay her eggs in his paralyzed body, is almost as large as Rubyhead. Cocuyo the firefly, who lights the forest in nights of June, is nearly the size of Rubyhead's mate, while Mariposa, the butterfly, could shelter the little pair beneath her wings.

Of the forest's coloring, that of Rubyhead is, at the same time, the most brilliant and the most changeable. Glowing dawn, shower-born rainbow, or midsummer sunset, have no finer hues than glisten in Rubyhead's plumage. His little recurved beak is jet, his tail a sapphire, his body an emerald, and his head a ruby. I often wondered where those rare colors of the forest dwellers were derived. Flamingo, the swamp-wader, has a plumage that is as rosy as a wisp of cirrus cloud in the glow of sunset. Shy and retreating, she builds her tall nests of mud in the loneliest parts of the swamp. There she pokes her sharp bill into oozy marl, in search of Caracol, the snail. The Voices of the Forest have a legend that this food is the cause of the color in her plumage, which though white as snow, at length becomes tinged with the hue of fire. Cameleon the lizard takes his color from what he rests upon and though he may have been all gray and black on the bark of a tree, let him crawl out on some leaves and rest there a few moments, and he will become so green

that the sharpest of eyes could not recognize him. Cao has a coat of night, but over it gleam dull tinges of blue and purple, like metals tarnished with the sulphurous breath of volcanic fires. Who can tell if these colors really belong to Cao's plumage? Who knows whether the passing clouds and blue sky may not have played some part therein?

Rubyhead's coloring was derived from other sources than any of these. He seems to glow with internal fire, which changes with every point of view, as the prisms of his plumage dissolve the sunbeams into their component parts. This marvellous fact came to my knowledge soon after reaching the forest top. When father died, Rubyhead, as was natural, came to the upper branches of Caoba's eldest son, and there he built his little nest. One day, during our early acquaintance, my attention was attracted by a mysterious quality in his coloring unlike that of any other bird or flower of the forest. Overcome by curiosity, and at the same time filled with admiration, I said:

"Rubyhead your colors change so fast I almost suspect you are Cameleon's little brother."

"You are deceived, Caoba. My colors do not really change. I did but turn to admire the dawn. See how yonder, low-hung cloud is fringed with rosy sun-beams! Shall we have rain-showers today, Caoba?"

"Yes, Rubyhead, the cooling rain will fall as the sun begins to descend the western sky. Yesterday,

as you remember, Iris unveiled her colored arch before twilight began to glow. Tomorrow the forest will feel the dark thunder-cloud at noon. After that will follow three days of sunshine."

"O, mighty Caoba! how do you learn these mysteries of nature? How can you, with such assurance, prophesy her wonders?"

"They are plainly written in God's blue sky if you would but read them, Rubyhead."

"You have the burning day and all the starry night to contemplate the face of God, Caoba, while I must sometime sleep and sometime care for my little ones."

"You are full of wisdom, dear Rubyhead, even though you are smaller than Mariposa, the butterfly. But do you, once more, I pray, turn to view the dawn . . . even so . . . O Rubyhead, all your gay colors have vanished! alas, poor Rubyhead!"

"Pity not little Rubyhead," said he, turning to me in re-created hues of fire and steel, for as he moved those colors came back again, "you do foretell the showers of rain; you know the hour of the rising moon; you feel the coming of the unborn night-wind, ere it wafts Sarsas' sweet perfume seaward, but, O wise Caoba, not till now has it been given you to know the rainbow in Rubyhead's plumage."

So this is a picture of little Rubyhead. In dark days of storm he seemed a flash of sunlight. In sunlight he was brother to the rainbow. Emblem of happiness, he pauses amid rare flowers; anon he flits back to his nest, and, like God's messenger, traces

a line of fire through blue heaven. His little head is a gleaming gem, as if a ruby had been burnished with silver and gold; like a ruddy dawn of April silvered with the silver, which midnight moonbeams pour over Cienaga's silent lagoons; or, like a twilight, gilded with the gold, which shines in the tremulous path of sunset on a tropic sea.

VOICES OF THE FOREST

A bird of the air shall carry the voice.
—*Ecclesiastes*, 10:20.

The fringe of the forest comes to the sea's border and tastes the salt spray of her coral shores. The fringe of the forest touches the great swamp and her mangroves are submerged in black waters. Though not one of many million trees ever beholds the dark Cienaga or the blue Caribbean, they, and Caoba also, know each of them. Not within my memory, nor of my father before me, has the man-ape wandered through this wilderness, yet, wonderful as it may seem, the forest knows many things about him.

For years I marvelled at this mysterious transmission of ideas. I asked myself,—through what unknown channels, or from whence, comes to the forest this unexplainable knowledge of things far and near? At length I learned that the Voices of the Forest tell them, one to another, and the birds of the air carry their messages.

Cao, chattering in the sun; tocoloro, mournful in his love song; the nocturnal crickets pouring forth their ceaseless music; Terral, the night-wind, stirring

the moon-silvered leaves; winged visitors from remote lands; these are the Voices of the Forest. These and numberless tones so faint and pure that the forest alone can hear them; white termites gnawing in their tunnels of perpetual darkness; murmur of Cienaga's waters, as they flow in subterranean caverns; mysterious pulsing of life through leaves and flowers; earth-borne sounds which may be, perchance, the voice of surf on coral sands, conveyed through the ancient sea-floor, under the wilderness.

So I began to know the words of the Voices of the Forest, even as the forest knows itself and remote places beyond her realm. And there were winged messengers who arrive every year from the far northland, and from the southern continent, spanning leagues of unbroken sea, when the Great Cold and the Great Drought urge them to our fairer land. The summer tanager and the water-thrush cross the blue Caribbean, bringing word of the humid jungles of the Amazon, where the jaguar prowls, and the boa writhes amid forests filled with dangers that are deadly to the man-ape. From the pine-glades of Florida and the Carolinas, redstart and bobolink come to tell of the man-ape's vast colonies; of cities smoke-obscured by day, spotted at night with lurid lights, and, beyond them, of northern lands mantled with a wilderness of evergreens, where winter dwells and the rain falls soft and white.

The land birds cross the seas, flying from continent to continent, and bring tales from earth's remote

corners. The plover, staking all on one continuous flight of eighteen hundred miles, risks broad seas whose only meaning if he fails, is certain death. The swallow, by land and sea, has girdled one fourth the globe. But if, at weary length, the land birds tire, tern and stormy petrel, and the gale-defying albatross, sailing above the vast reach of ice-burdened seas, greet them from out the Land of Long Night, and so the Voices of the Sea help bear mysterious messages between the frozen poles and flaming tropics.

THE REALM OF SUPREME BEAUTY

Above the forest lies the domain of air, realm of supreme beauty. The oceans of air and of water are brothers, having many peculiarities and wonders in common, though they appear so different. The depths of the sea are blue and the abysses of air are blue. Restless winds caress the moving trees at the bottom of the ocean of air, even as the marine plants of the sea sway forever to the rhythm of briny billows. Soaring birds, floating between forest and cloud, rule their kingdom, but not even they have power to reach the uppermost limits of the cold and unsustaining air. Even the finny creatures of the sea delight in warm and sparkling shoals where sunshine and life abound, and only the boldest dare explore those icy depths of ocean where eternal darkness reigns.

Before I had seen the sky, in the days of my youth, I thought nature could offer no fairer charms than the infinitely varied leaves and flowers of the low forest. When the Roble breaks forth her blossoms of rose-tinged snow, and opens her myriad, smiling faces, to gaze in wide-eyed wonder round them, surely

the forest is crowned queen of beauty by them. Yet the magic that reveals them is sunlight, filtered through the sea of air. The Baria, mantled in her springtime garments, appears a virgin clothed in the softest of bridal veils. But from the kingdom of clouds comes a compelling power which shakes down her glistening petals and astonishes the heated forest with visions as of snow-showers in some northern land. Even when fairyland's chaste emblem, the white water-lily, opens her enchanting flower on some mirrored pool, the powers of air command her. Dawn awakens her, sunbeams revel amid her golden stamens and ivory petals, the south wind wafts her heavenly perfume through the woodland and, when twilight has lulled her to drowsiness, the pale moon looks down and guards her sleeping form. These are fair phantoms of the forest, delighting the wilderness for a brief moment, only to disappear in the all-embracing arms of death. Out of dark earth and the swamp's black ooze, out of air and sunlight, they are born. In fragrance and color they pass the glory of their short hour and then fade again to dark earth and black ooze, to live only in the forest's memory.

Now, as a full-grown tree, my gaze was directed upward and I came to know the wonders of the ocean of air, realm of sunrise and sunset, of clouds and storms and of infinitely varied colors. This is the kingdom of supreme beauty which is the domain of the dawn. Dawns that are unnumbered and infinite in their variety. Dawns of writhing mist,

when the sun's pale disc is veiled in fog; dawns of bloody fire and of gold; dawns that are harbingers of day, at whose gladdening touch the forest scatters her dews and pours forth a song from a myriad joyful throats.

This also is the realm of the flaming noon. From east to west and from north to south, blue empyrean raises her azure dome. The forest has its confines; horizons bind land and sea; but the ocean of air suffers neither horizons nor borders to define her kingdom. Boundless, it curves downward as a globe encircling a globe. When the elements cease their raging, and thunder-clouds sail across the great deep, their snowy crests are still visible a hundred leagues beyond the horizons of earth and water.

And the flaming noon is father of the soft, sea-born cumulus. Virazon, the sea-breeze, driving them landward, transforms them to illusions of mountains in the northern sky, towering in radiance and gloom. Conscious of power, they return to drench the forest with torrential rain. No bird of land or sea dares scale the forbidding heights, leagues above earth, to which those stupendous cloud-forms raise their domed crests. Born at dawn, fostered by the sun, the sea-breeze completes, each day, these mighty edifices to glorify the wonders of twilight.

This is the zone of the filmy cirrus; angels' veils of the sky, spun from heaven's icy breath. Showers of scintillant crystals are they, falling through unsubstantial air. They mock the sun with spectrum

cloud-forms, and girdle the moon with halos. No one knows the secrets of those unapproachable places above the realm of hail and thunder. Nor how nature, the supreme artist, draws those graceful lines of rose and gold on the sunset sky, and paints fire with a brush of snow. Who shall tell the time of the lace-like cirrus' melting when she changes her slender strands to floating, silvered isles, in the purple night? What power commands the moon and bids her dimple the forest underneath them with fairy lights and shadows?

The ocean of air is throne of sunset and the twilight. Sunsets and twilights unnumbered, whose wonders and majesty never can be told. Sunsets of a sharp-rayed sun, piercing the angry cloud-rack; twilights of the new-born moon; sunsets that are glorified dawns; twilights of a magic dreamland where the home of thunder is a vision of opal and sea-shells, translucent through the veils of dying showers; sunsets that foretell coming darkness and deadly cold; twilights that are symbols of death, as they merge into night's bosom.

That brother of the sea, which is the ocean of air, is birthplace of the midnight rain-shower, most inspiring of heavenly visions. Then do fireflies trace their course through the humid air, as the lunar rainbow shows her pale arch against the velvet sky, and the forest is breathless under the spell of unseen powers. Not in driving gale nor in thunder, for those who play now are potent gods. Glowing with

internal fire of silent heat-lightning, the piled up cumuli move slowly, like ships becalmed and at the mercy of tides and currents. Moonlight touches those towers of storm, leaps down through the blue-black haze, and transforms the forest's green to silver. From yonder shadows come murmurs as of the soft night-wind, though the calm of a motionless forest says the night-wind still is sleeping. These are ghostly voices of cloudland's mystery children. Voices of falling raindrops and distant showers, calling from wandering cloud-shadows, melting again to silence in the moving radiance.

This realm of clouds and storm is one of great danger to the forest. When I had escaped the perils of my youth and had reached the forest roof, I felt sure that a long and tranquil life lay before me. But the jealous gods have appointed a fearful destroyer to wreak their vengeance on those towering monarchs which aspire to heaven and rise above their fellows. Soon after attaining my full height, an event took place that might well have been the last of my life. It occurred in June, that rainest of all months, when the sky is almost constantly overcast and the thunderstorms of day continue far into the night. On one such occasion, a dreadful storm was raging and the midnight forest was illumined by repeated and almost continuous lightning flashes. Momentarily by their light, I could see through the blue-gray rain, storm-lashed branches, down-bent under the burden of falling water, while, anon, they were swallowed up

in a black and horrible darkness. To this wild night there came a brief calm, and suddenly I began to feel a new and mysterious sensation, tingling and yet uplifting, as though there were passing through me, messages from another world. The leaves of my topmost branches began to stand on end, reaching upward, all atremble, and presently gave forth a faint sound like the hissing of serpents.

Then came a mighty explosion as though it were the very destruction of the universe itself, while sinuous streams of blue fire, edged with gold, like molten metal, ran down my rain-soaked trunk. Scales of black bark were ripped away and sent flying through the ozone-laden air, and furrows were cut deep into my rosy sap-wood. A bolt of fire tore away one of my largest branches, and, leaping to a neighboring tree, split it open from crest to lowest roots, while the wreckage of this pitiful destruction fell to the gound amid the echoing and terrified forest. Then, like a mighty wave of sound, breaking ever and anon on some rock-bound coast, the rolling thunder seemed to retreat heavenward, as though the vengeful gods had recalled their dread messengers back to the dark clouds whence they came.

THE GREAT VOICES

The morning sun struck into the forest, on the day after this dreadful event, veiled in heavy mist. It was the heart of the rainy season and already at this early hour the cumulus clouds were building up their columnar forms, soft-edged and watery, with promise of thunder. This was the time of year when the trees rejoiced, growing by leaps and bounds, while the animals and birds were suffering in the steamy heat. As I surveyed the destruction wrought by the thunderbolt of the night before, I realized that the scars in my bark would soon be healed, though nothing could replace the great branch that had been torn away. I counted myself fortunate even to have escaped with my life. Yet, for some reason, I felt no more fear of lightning than I had before. I knew that my adventure was a most rare chance, unlikely ever to happen again, and that while thousands of lightning bolts fall from heaven, few trees are destroyed by them. Rubyhead was full of excitement, and, wishing to show his sympathy, said to me:

"What an awful voice is the Voice of Thunder, Caoba! Even the proud man-ape regards it as the most terrifying sound in nature."

"The man-ape's heart is ruled more by fear than love, Rubyhead. He dreads the Voice of Thunder for he is deaf to the sublime wonder of it. He hears in it only heaven's destructive power. This is a mighty sound indeed, yet, of the four Great Voices, it is the least. The Second Voice is greater, the Voice of Song Birds."

"This Voice, Caoba, belongs to Rubyhead's kingdom. It circles the whirling globe, and greets the rosy dawn as the birds awaken. It fades to silence in the pale twilight, girdling land and sea in bonds of love that are stronger than steel."

"Even so, Rubyhead, the man-ape thinks his own voice the greatest of all music."

"He is proudest of all animals and thinks his achievements are little less than divine. Yet does he know the music of the wilderness? Does he understand the true spirit of the meadow-lark's song at eventide? Has he heard, in his inmost soul, the voices of the warblers in their springtime love making, or has he stood silent, in wonder, at the plaintive song of the hermit thrush, when her liquid notes float through sun-flecked beech woods?"

"I have never heard this sweet woodland music, Rubyhead. But the voice of the mockingbird lingers in my memory when she adopts, as her own, the loveliest of forest tones, and molds them with caressing melody. You speak truly, Rubyhead, when you say that love is a mightier force than fear. The Voice of Song Birds is greater than the Voice of Thunder."

"There is another that excels them both,—the Voice of the Sea. This is a symbol of vast strength and power and mighty Caoba alone should proclaim it."

"Yes, Rubyhead, the Third Voice is one of unspeakable majesty, and yet of unutterable sadness. The Voice of the Sea, unsilenced through the ages, is a sound of raging and anger, singing forever its funeral dirges over dead men's bones on lonely shores. Its younger brother, the Voice of Rushing Waters, cries out but little less sadly in the mountain torrent, the lashing hail and the falling rain. The Voice of the Sea is the melody of destructive powers, the eternal and relentless wail of destiny."

"Your words make me very sad, Caoba. Have you not pondered too long in loneliness? Let us speak of more cheerful things. Tell me of the Fourth Voice, last and greatest of all."

"This voice, bringer of joy and happiness to all the world, is withal so sweet and gentle that little Rubyhead should tell it."

"Yes, Caoba, for it belongs to the realm in which I live. This is the Voice of the Wind. It sings among your leaves and flowers; it bears heavenly perfume on invisible wings; it stirs the wild rose on the cool mountainside. This is the soul of forest music, less than the thunder, more mysterious than the songs of birds, gentler than the Voice of the Sea, but greater than all."

THE GREAT VISIONS

These conversations between Rubyhead and myself were a never-ending source of pleasure and inspiration. Our quite different points of view, leading, however, to almost identical opinions on every subject, made it all the more interesting. Rubyhead, of course, was very proud of his ability to fly hither and yon over the forest roof, visiting distant places, and so meeting certain Voices of the Forest that rarely or never came to see me. In this way he often picked up bits of information that surprised me beyond measure. Not many days after our talk about the Great Voices we had opportunity to converse on a subject of similar nature. As may be imagined, we spoke of the Great Visions. I opened the conversation with a question:

"Rubyhead, why are the four Great Visions, the Sea, the Mountains, the Clouds, and the Stars, even more wonderful than the Great Voices?"

"I cannot imagine, Caoba, unless the eye is more intelligent than the ear."

"Even the first and least of these, Rubyhead, the Vision of the Sea, is wonderfully inspiring. This is

the monster salt bath of the age-long sweating earth. This is the broad and fathomless ocean, that chafes at the narrow confines of continents, and gnaws, with waves that never cease their thunder, the shores and cliffs of her kingdom's border."

"You speak truly, Caoba. The sea is also the great exemplar of the infinite straight line."

"*Rubyhead!*"

"Do I not speak true words, Caoba?"

"It was not their truth that astonished me. If little Rubyhead speaks in this manner, how shall Caoba talk? Where did you learn about 'infinite straight lines'?"

"Cao told me. Cao had it from Aura, though Rubyhead will have nothing to do with that filthy bird, eater of carrion."

"Aura, for all his habits, is one of the strongest flyers and an inspiration to the forest dwellers. Yet even he could hardly learn such words of the sea as you have just now spoken. Where did Aura find them?"

"The Voices of the Sea told Aura. Do not the sea-birds soar on and on for endless leagues, above the circular disc of ocean, yet under heaven's dome, till islands and continents are forgotten? And in every mile, and in each wing-span, of those airy flights, do they not behold the straight line where sky and water meet? From myriad points of view they see circles unnumbered, as they gaze on horizons that are themselves endless. I ask you, Caoba, is not the

vast sea the great exemplar of the infinite straight line?"

"You have spoken well, Rubyhead."

"I have many sources of information denied to you, Caoba. I have wings to bear me where my capricious will directs. You are doomed to remain, forever, motionless in the forest. In a short moment, only so long as while the sun's shadow moves the length of one of your leaves, I can fly over the forest's roof to the salt sea. There, on the gaunt arms of the poisonous Manzanillo, which stretches its weird branches over the water, I look down and admire the starfish and sea-cups of the crystal Caribbean. Or, again, I fly away to islands and coves of the great swamp, and discover the secret places where Garza, the white-plumed egret, builds her nest amid the slender, tasselled reeds. But, Caoba, you do not know the Vision of the Sea, nor of the mountains, for you have never beheld them."

"You speak truly, Rubyhead, when you say that Caoba is doomed to remain forever motionless as a prisoner of the forest. But, even so, Caoba has not yet failed to use those powers with which nature has so richly endowed him. Nor have the Voices of the Forest ceased to bear messages to him. And moreover, Caoba has in his service a messenger whose wings God has not clipped, nor ever will. Imagination! thou aerial spirit, ether-piercing child of fantasy, swifter than light and thought, to whom neither mountains nor seas are barriers, nor utmost bounds

of time or space give hindrance! This fleet spirit is ever at my command and though you have told very prettily, Rubyhead, how you can so swiftly fly to the reedy isles of Cienaga or the coral shores of the blue Caribbean, yet thanks to my silent messenger I voyage there and back before your flight begins. Listen, therefore, to Caoba, and tell me if he knows aught of that great vision of which you speak.

"The Vision of the Mountains, Rubyhead, is mightier than the Vision of the Sea, for the mountains rise from the sea's foundations and tower above its depths in cindery cones of fire. They hem the continents and islands with rocky walls. Their serrated peaks are rude tentacles that comb the moist breath of ocean and command her storm-clouds to render tribute in showers of hail and snow. They raise their proud heads in domes of barren granite; they pierce the sky with beetling crags and, in tottering cliffs, where splintered shales shriek in the icy air, they defy the storms of ages. Reaching from pole to pole, their gleaming summits call the man-ape's astonished gaze to their unutterable majesty. Such are the mountains, Rubyhead, eternal pathways from earth to heaven, which bind seas and clouds together in one unbroken leap from palm to glacier."

"Have Condor and the Golden Eagle sent word of the mountains to Caoba, from afar?"

"Condor and the soaring eagles have indeed sent their messages to the forest, but, Rubyhead, I shall

"The gaunt arms of the poisonous Manzanillo, which stretches its weird branches over the water."

"The gaunt arms of the poisonous Manzanillo, which stretches its weird branches over the water."



tell you even more wonderful things. Caoba, looking out of the forest depths, has beheld with his own eyes, not only the vast sea but the mountains and the frozen snow!"

"*Caoba!*"

"Are my words wonderful, Rubyhead?"

"It was not their wonder alone that astonished me. It was their truth, for when Caoba speaks, falsehood hides her head in shame. Yet I cannot understand you, Caoba. When I am perched on the highest of the forest giants, I have never viewed the sea from them. Aura rises far before he sees the mountains, whose nearest flanks are twenty leagues beyond the Cienaga. And again, the lore of the wilderness has never mentioned the hail as a visitor to the forest since time began, much less the snow."

"Rubyhead, I shall now explain these wonders which seem so marvellous to you. Do you fly upward till first you observe the ocean beyond the forest's border, and then poise motionless as you often do when you search the flowers for their honeyed stores."

"With joy I obey your commands, . . . now I behold the sea, Caoba!"

"And so likewise does Caoba, reflected in your bright eyes! And again, what think you of the passing shower when the setting sun makes the raindrops glisten? Is not every one of those liquid spheres a perfect mirror? Do I not then have a million lenses to send me images of the distant sea?"

"Caoba, the Great Visions are revealed to you more clearly than to Rubyhead for all his eyes and whirring wings."

"You have two eyes only, Rubyhead. But, tell me, how many leaves have I?"

"Who shall number Caoba's leaves, or the stars?"

"With every leaf an eye, is not the great sea revealed to me a million-million times in the falling rain?"

"Your conceptions are marvellous, Caoba. I wonder how you will explain that you have seen the Vision of the Mountains?"

"I can best answer by asking you what time did the moon wander last night through the sky?"

"I saw it when the late night-wind, swaying your branches, woke me for a moment."

"And did it not show a ragged eastern limb?"

"'Tis true, though Rubyhead knows not its meaning."

"All the years of your life and back to your father's father before you would not measure the hours that I have gazed upon the orb of night sailing above the forest. Countless times have I watched those craters of the moon fill and unfill again with light and shadows. Those are mountains, Rubyhead, greater than any on earth."

"Caoba, you are indeed monarch of the forest! You have viewed the mountains and the sea with your own eyes. Even so I cannot imagine how you have seen the frozen snow amid the burning heat of the forest."

"I have seen the snow even at the very time you felt the blazing sun and sought the midday shade of my great branches. Once more fly upward to utmost reach of your emerald wings and bring back word of what you find there."

"Rubyhead is breathless with the sayings of Caoba. Let us ask the Voices of the Forest as to the affairs of the sky."

"Then you will admit that when you rise a little way above the trees, a fresher air sustains your wings than near the ground. Aura soars at vaster heights than Rubyhead and tells of cold such as the forest knows only in the northers of winter. What think you, then, of the towering thundercloud far above Aura's utmost daring, whose crest glimmers with pale flashes in the night?"

"It must be very cold, Caoba, in those realms of thunder."

"You have, no doubt, observed those gossamer veils, the thin cirrus clouds which float so far above the domes of lightning and of storm? Have you not seen them glow before the dawn, and at twilight still hold their fire and gold, long after the forest was wrapped in night's dark arms? Those thin and streaming cloud-forms are showers of crystal ice and snow, born from the blue of heaven, melting into the blue again, symbols of lifeless realms where earth's creatures dare not venture."

"Caoba, immovable in the forest, you have seen visions that are not of the forest, visions that Ruby-

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head has never dreamed of till now. My heart is filled with shame."

"Be not downcast, Rubyhead. Even the man-ape, who says he is wisest of all animals, has rarely seen these things. With dull eyes he gazes even on the Third Vision, that wondrous realm of the clouds. This is the domain of color where nature paints with rainbow and sunset, mightier than the sea for it rests on the sea, greater than the mountains for it towers above them, glorified interpreter to the universe."

"And this vision is also the home of Rubyhead. It is father to the Voice of Song Birds which you have truly said is greater than the Voice of Thunder."

"And, Rubyhead, the Fourth Vision, last and greatest of all, transcends the Visions of the Sea, the Mountains and the Clouds. This is illimitable space beyond them all, revealed when Caoba watches through the long, cool night, and Rubyhead sleeps tranquilly in his arms. This is the sublime Vision of the Stars, twinkling in infinite space, veiled with eternal mysteries that neither Rubyhead nor Caoba shall ever know."

THE THOUGHTS OF CAOBA

Two centuries have passed since I was born. Two centuries so replete with fateful happenings that the events of my childhood seem to have taken place in some remote and distant world. How dim and faint, now appears that dawn of my life, when, as a seed, I floated to the ground by the pale light of the crescent moon! The shadows are gathering round me. The story of Caoba's life is nearly told.

As I look back two hundred years and review events of surpassing interest, that which most strongly impresses me is the vast change that has taken place in the wilderness. Many kinds of birds and animals have disappeared forever. Even the ideas which arise within me from contemplation of nature's wonders have likewise suffered change. As a seedling I looked up with pride at father's towering form. It seemed that he belonged to a race apart from others and that only the mighty cedar and shag-barked sabicu were worthy of his company. But two centuries have taught me many things. I have become acquainted with trees that were far higher and nobler than Caoba. I have seen the lofty

Royal palms of the Cienaga, most beautiful of all trees that the world knows, rising like Grecian columns fifty yards above the ground and waving their glistening fronds in the sunlight far above the forest roof.

With increased respect for the marvels of the forest that excel me, has come due regard for the lowly forms of life upon which, in my early days, I looked with contempt and pride. And this broader viewpoint makes me feel that there is no living creature in all the wilderness without some beauty and some strength. And there is no living thing no matter how beautiful that has not some weakness that may be fatal. Success in the forest is not only to be beautiful but to endure. Even in the relatively short period of my lifetime, I have seen creatures that, perhaps, may have required millions of years to produce, pass forever into the endless void of nothingness.

The macaw, Cotorra's larger cousin, has been extinct for half a century. I remember when the tree tops used to flame with their color. For some unknown reason they began to disappear, their scattered flocks were reduced to only one, and then, suddenly, as if a light had been snuffed out, they were no more. Jutia's small relative has been driven into the wooded isles of the great swamp for his final stand against nature. Cao says that the last survivors of his own family are now collected in this part of the island. The Voices of the Forest tell us

that no one has seen the ivory-billed woodpecker for the last quarter of a century. Thus do varied forms of life enter oblivion, and with their passing it is as though the woodland had suffered a great bereavement. New creations, evolved from nature's fertile stores, take their places, but through the agency of changes, so slow, that the forest knows not their coming. In the great scheme of nature the death of an individual means nothing, but the extinctions of entire species are events that mark the milestones of eternity.

So, if success depends, in part, on the power to endure, is it true that Caoba and the forest giants alone are worthy? Caoba lives two centuries and barely reproduces his kind before he falls in the hurricane. Caoba can send his whirling seeds only a hundred yards from where he stands, and when his offspring has reached the forest top, he likewise may attempt the same. To march a league by this slow process would take twelve hundred years. Yet Jaguey tempts the forest denizens by edible fruit and, on the wings of a bird, spans this space in a moment.

The forest sings a deathless song, which is a song of eternal mystery. No man-ape has ever seen Rubyhead's nest since the world began. Who will say where it is concealed amid the flowery gardens of my great branches? Cao and Cotorra know this woodland secret. Aura and the birds of the air might learn if they were not so busy with their own affairs. The Voices of the Forest will not betray Rubyhead

nor shall Caoba. Who knows the mystery of Cotorra's faithfulness? When the springtime forest breaks into leaf and flower, and when all nature hears the call of new life, Cotorra's gaudy flocks sail through the sky. They fill the trees with color and drown gentler music with their harsh cries. Yet, perchance there is among them a single bird who flies alone and sits apart, ever true to some long-lost love. These mysteries the Voices of the Forest might tell if they would.

The water-lily, sleeping through the moonlit night, feels the coming dawn long before her hour and unfolds white petals to greet the sun's first slanting rays. The land crabs swarm through the forest, like an invading army, clad in bright red, and yellow. Their countless thousands cover the ground for a little time and then they disappear no less mysteriously than they came. What unknown impulse commands them? No one knows whence they come nor whither they go. Celestial visitors from starry worlds streak the night with pale lines of fire. Who knows from what realms of infinite space they may have wandered through the ages to brighten the wilderness for a moment and vanish forever? These are mysteries that the Voices of the Forest will not tell for they know them not.

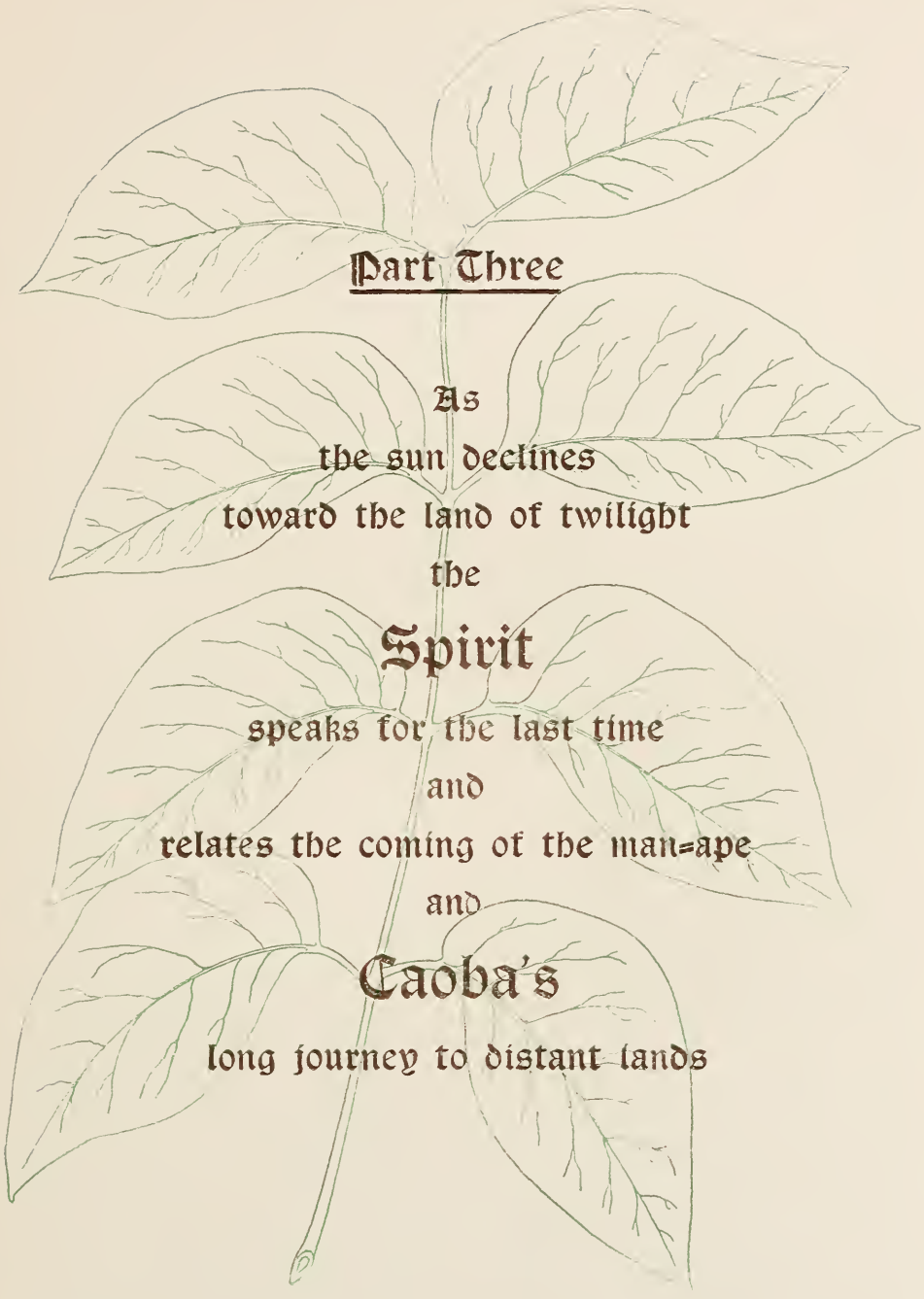
But there are other and far mightier wonders that I have seen in the world of clouds and of stars. One hundred and twenty times have I watched the sun sweep slowly southward to permit winter her uncer-

tain and brief moment of power. One hundred and twenty times have I seen the great life-giver move northward, day by day, commanding the thunder and the rain, and calling the forest to deck itself with flowers. Fifty thousand times have I looked upon the sun as he rose above the forest's rim, and in all that vast number the pattern of his fretted disc was never twice the same. Fifty thousand dawns of rose and gold, fifty thousand twilights of fire and purple, have I beheld during the years of my reign in the forest, and every dawn and every twilight, even to these last days, seemed more perfect than any that had gone before.

One thousand and five hundred times I have welcomed the crescent moon as she sprang from the twilight of the western sky; one thousand and five hundred times have I followed her, night after night, as she crossed the celestial vault of stars, to fade, as a crescent, in the golden arms of dawn. Above the whirling globe she moves, on her daily journey of ten thousand leagues; gliding over dark forests and misty plains; crossing chill mountain peaks; peering into ocean's sapphire caverns; building silver pathways across boundless seas of dancing waves; blending her radiance with star-pierced Auroras on frozen polar snows.

And I have been astonished when the moon, suspended as a coppery globe in earth's shadow, shone ruddy in the dull rays of earth's encircling light. The sun, also, has startled me as it disappeared in the

onward march of an eclipsing moon and changed to a fire-ringed sphere of night, and, presently, the forest floor was spotted with gleaming crescents that were but pictures of this passing wonder. Then did the Voices of the Night cry out from the bewildered forest when it should have been midday. I have gazed in awe at portentous comets, migrant visitors of the sky, fulfilling their unknown destinies, when they brushed the stars with monster plumes of pale fire, hastening on to girdle the sun and disappear forever in endless space. And in early spring I have marvelled at the Zodiacal Light, that faint, heavenly flame, which slants up from the place of sun's setting long after night has cast her dark mantle over sea and land. This vernal and ghostly glow, mysterious daughter of the ecliptic, marks the celestial course of the moon and wandering planets. Here Mercury shines, close-bound to the sun, as though he would ever hide in Phœbus' flaming fire. And this gleaming phantom of an unknown world which haunts night's border, is the path of blood-red Mars when he leaves the sun and wanders far into starry night, and of Venus, less venturesome, content to serve as the glorious herald of dawn, or as fair handmaiden to twilight and the new-born moon.



Part Three

As
the sun declines
toward the land of twilight
the
Spirit
speaks for the last time
and
relates the coming of the man-ape
and
Caoba's
long journey to distant lands

CAOBA'S ENEMY APPEARS

Ominous changes took place in the forest. After ages of tranquillity the wilderness felt, in some mysterious way, the presence of unseen danger. Time passed, and at length the western horizon, whose hummocky and undulating outline I knew in each most intimate detail—for had it not been impressed unnumbered times on setting sun—and moon-discs?—took new form from day to day. And it was always the rounded tops of the highest trees that disappeared. In summer thunderstorms, or hurricanes of autumn, it was not unusual to note the fall of great trees. At this time, however, in the heart of the dry season, when only gentle trade-winds caressed the wilderness, there were no destructive forces of storm or gale to cause changes in the horizon's contour. But there were more portentous signs of coming danger. Flocks of birds rose, suddenly and without apparent reason, from various parts of the forest, and flew distractedly hither and yon. Calls and shouts echoed from great distances, the approaching dawns were announced by the clarion notes of some strange bird, unknown to the Voices

of the Forest, slender columns of smoke rose here and there, and at night, low clouds and banks of fog were tinged with the glow of fire.

These were obvious signals of a new order of things that I could plainly see for myself. But the Voices of the Forest gave fateful confirmation of my own misgivings. Aura who soared so far above the earth, Garza, the white egret, ever voyaging from swamp to sea and back from salt water to fresh lagoons, Cao, and Jutia the tree-rat, kept repeating, "The man-ape is coming! Man-ape, dread destroyer of forests!" So the wilderness, which knew no fear, was possessed by fear. My heart likewise was filled with anxiety and alarm. Again and again I asked myself if our doom were not at hand, and wondered if the beautiful creations, evolved through long ages, were to be sacrificed and destroyed forever.

As I thought of this there came conflicting conceptions that would not be reconciled. One was a vision, fleeting and faint, of the man-ape in some dim, and hardly recallable, past. Through power of instinctive memory, this picture, whose latent image must have been buried in my inmost nature under countless pages of forest history, became, as I pondered, ever stronger and more distinct. In that long-past age, I saw Caoba as a tree with simple and primitive leaves, living in a forest far different from what we know it now, and inhabited by the man-ape's ancestors. Even in those times he ruled, by the power of a superior mind, the uncouth and hairy

creatures which were his cousins. This, then, was one picture as handed down by my own memory from the dawn of the forest's history.

But, in opposition to these ideas was a far different conception of this strange creature as set forth by the Voices of the Forest. For they said that the man-ape, during the vast lapse of time since he and Caoba had been separated, had achieved great things; that he had become the most intelligent of all animals; that he had conquered the sea and land, and even the ocean of air, and that he commanded the forces of nature to do his bidding. He had built great cities, had clothed himself in beautiful garments and rare jewels and had proclaimed himself master of the universe, created, as he claimed, in the image of God.

With such different conceptions in mind it was natural that I should look forward to my first view of the man-ape even though he were coming to destroy me. Then, one day, I heard a shout or cry, unlike anything of my experience, and forthwith two creatures advanced from the forest shadows and approached me. And what struck me most strongly was the wonder of their walking erect, unlike any other animal of the wilderness. My memory pictured the man-ape leaping, or running on all fours. If he ever stood upright it was only for a moment and even then very timidly. So I wondered what kind of animal this might be. Certainly not the man-ape who, according to all the marvellous things I had heard, should have been clothed in white raiment and

should have progressed through the forest proudly, as angels, if not as gods. Except for the shape of their heads, these creatures were far uglier and more unkempt than the clean and primitive man-ape of my memory. They had hairy beards and blackened tusks, and their bodies were scantily covered with torn and filthy clothing. Another difference from the primitive man-ape was that they carried long, sharp knives, with which they cut the vines and smaller trees with the greatest ease. One of them placed his paw on my trunk and, looking up into my branches said, "Que Caoba mas linda, cara!" Now I did not, at this time, understand the chatter of the man-ape but I felt sure that what he said was in admiration.

As they walked through the forest there went before them an unseen god, the God of Fear. Cao and Cotorra flew away, the wild animals went into hiding and the Voices of the Forest were hushed. Even Rubyhead, though he knew there was no immediate danger for him, remained quietly concealed amid my branches. Then I addressed my little friend, "Is this the image of God, Rubyhead?" And Rubyhead, to my great surprise, replied, "The man-ape so proclaims himself. This is the man-ape, Caoba."

Presently they departed and were seen no more for several days. Meanwhile the advancing wave of destruction swept through the woodland. The crash and groan of falling trees came ever nearer and I

could now hear the blows of axes on every side. One day, in the cool of morning, the same two creatures returned. This time they brought food and water in various utensils. They were accompanied by a pitiful dog, which was altogether the most forlorn living thing that I had ever seen, even more so than the wild dog of the Cienaga. This pathetic protégé of the man-ape was covered with mange and tortured by fleas, while his body was little more than a skeleton, over which the skin was tightly drawn. Wet with the morning dew, shivering with cold, after receiving sundry cuffs and blows, he cowered disconsolate, a picture of despair, even as he remained on guard over his master's food and filthy garments.

Meanwhile the two man-apes cleared the ground near me with dexterous blows of their long knives, or machetes, which passed through the young tree-stems as through air, giving forth a musical sound that might have been pleasing if not so deadly. Then, taking up their keen-edged axes, they began to strike blows in turn upon my trunk. Chips of rough bark, black without, rosy as the dawn within, began to strew the ground. They had hardly reached the first part of my pink sap-wood, before they paused in amazement. Looking at a chip, one of them exclaimed, "Caracollilo, y de primera, cara!" Though I was not familiar with their chatter, I knew that Caracol, the sea-shell, was contorted and winding and so I felt sure that this term must mean that my wood was not straight-grained, as ordinary

mahogany, but, on the contrary, richly figured. In any case it was so hard that the work of cutting was greatly increased. It was nearly noon before they had chopped a wedge-shaped opening half-way through my trunk. Then, laying down their axes, they took up earthen water jugs, and opening their mouths, poured streams of water down their parched throats. It seemed a pity to defile heaven's pure distillation by contact with those gaping jaws, lined with black and broken tusks. Uncovering their food, composed of cooked grain and the meat of the wild pig, they picked up morsels in their dirty paws, reminding me of two gigantic and horrible land-crabs. After giving the scanty remnants to their half-starved dog, they lay on the ground and fell into a deep slumber during the hottest part of the day.

At length they resumed their labors, this time on the opposite side of my trunk. Hours passed and the sun began to show the golden glow of evening. Perhaps, all unwittingly, I was looking for the last time over the billowy sea of green tree-tops, and for me there would be no further sunsets and colored twilights. Lulled by the rhythmic monotony of their now enfeebled blows, the events of my long life began to pass before me as in a dream. I thought of my first flight as a seed, of my struggle to reach upward out of the low forest, of the manifold dangers of hurricane, storm and lightning, and then I reviewed my long years spent in silent contemplation. For the poor creatures hacking at my trunk I had no feeling

of contempt but rather of pity. What did they know of Caoba, monarch of the forest? To them, I was merely a tree, though of such size and beauty that even their dwarfed souls must needs be filled with wonder and admiration. They could destroy me in one day, though I had required two centuries to reach my present glory.

And then the thought came to me,—was I not one of the greatest trees of the forest, greater even than my father before me? Did not my crooked and sinuous roots plunge deep into an ancient sea-bed, grasping its corals and shells, even feeling the faint ebb and flow of tides as the moon controlled them? I rose above the sea and therefore I was greater than the sea. My domed crest met the sky and felt the cold mists from the great swamp. Are these banks of fog aught else than clouds that ride low over the forest? They are brothers to the mighty cumulus. So, even as the Vision of the Mountains I bind sea and clouds together.

And now the blows of the man-ape, for the first time, cause my highest leaves to tremble and send thrills of fateful messages through my inmost fibers. Yet, even so, my thoughts turned ever to the Great Voices and the Great Visions. It was as though, having spent so long a time in contemplation of the things of eternity, I too, had become part of eternity. Only one thing was denied me or I should be equal with God. O that I had this divine power! O that, like the birds of the air, I too, could *move* and I should be God!

And this thought must have come also to the dull-visioned man-ape. Otherwise how shall I understand his looks of apprehension as, from time to time, he starts back, half-affrighted, and glances up at my towering branches? Does he not know, instinctively, his presumption in coming so far into this dark and secret forest? Does he not feel the awful sacrilege of daring to lay his paws on the black bark of mighty Caoba, which for two long centuries, no element of earth or sky has touched except the rain, and sunshine, and the blue-flamed lightning?

Suddenly there arose shrieks of terror from the man-apes. They drop their axes and flee for their lives, for now they recognize that Caoba *is* God! The forest stands, as it has stood for ages, and Caoba begins to move majestically among the trees, while the wilderness looks on in amazement! O victory! Now, is he god of the sea-breeze, for the soft south-wind rustles amid my leaves and it is *Caoba* who causes the south-wind to blow! God of the storm-wind, breaking the branches of trees,—and of the lightning—hear the crashing of strained fibers! . . . Ha! . . . now behold the god Caoba crumple the forest! . . . well done sturdy lancewood, a strong blow hast thou dealt me . . . dost thou too groan, O mighty Jocuma, when Caoba cleaves thy yellow wood of iron strength as he would cleave the transparent air? . . . god of the dreadful hurricane as he falls in thunder!

The forest still echoed to the dying voice of her

proudest offspring and the strained trees danced back to their places, or fell to earth forever, when I heard again a great shout from the man-ape. From the distance there came an answering cry. No, the man-ape had not been killed in Caoba's fall and they were calling their companions to tell them so. This then, was not a cry of fear, but of victory.

Rubyhead was sitting, on my now prostrate branches, after a long absence, and I said to him;—

"Neither God, nor even Caoba, Rubyhead."

"God you are not, nor ever were. Pride alone has made you think so. O, Caoba, for many moons have I known your fate, even from the time the man-ape first came to this wilderness. Long ago I asked the Voices of the Forest that they should not tell you. I could not bear to see them mutilate your noble form and so I went away to grieve in silence."

"Alas, poor Rubyhead! At one blow they have destroyed your home and your best friend. Caoba is dying. Rubyhead now alone remains to tell the forest's wonders."

"A few short, sad years, measure the term of little Rubyhead's life. But you, Caoba, in your hard and imperishable wood have something of eternity. Do not think with scorn of these poor creatures who have laid low your mighty form. It is a call of the man-ape from a world you do not know, a yearning to feel the beauty of the forest. Did you not see the wonder of these lowly beings as they first beheld your richly figured wood? In those marvellous convolu-

tions, in the varying light and shade which marks every fiber of your great trunk, is hidden a story such as the forest never before has told. You have written in your heart of starry nights, of dawns and twilights, of rainbows and of flowers. You shall go to far distant lands and tell the wonders of the wilderness. O Caoba, it is for you to pity poor, little Rubyhead, who may never carry a message of beauty beyond the forest! O, fortunate and enviable Caoba, who shall live through the coming years, crossing vast seas and continents, to bear a message of inspiration to the sorrowful man-ape!"

CAOBA GOES ON A LONG JOURNEY

Night fell. The shrill-voiced crickets sounded their nocturnal music as they had done for endless centuries. The forest's life was neither less nor more because Caoba had fallen. Courageously and relentlessly the wilderness, repairing the accidents of time if possible, must move forward under its irresistible impulse.

For a time it seemed as though I passed into a twilight land where dreams alone held sway. Shorn of branches and leaves, those myriad eyes and ears which had kept me in touch with nature; stunned by the cruel blows of the vile creatures who had brought about my fall; ghostly visions came to me, even as they had done in my childhood when a mere seed at the forest top.

In those half-dreams I saw the man-ape gazing on my prostrate form, . . . he cut away my upper branches, . . . he opened a road through the neighboring trees, . . . days passed. Lights of flickering lanterns gleamed in the midnight forest and strange cries were heard. It was the man-ape guiding a train of oxen, which latter were hauling a vehicle that

was merely a pair of giant wheels, bound together by a thick axle of steel. By heroic exertions alone could they force a way through the jungle with its innumerable obstacles. The enormous oxen, better tended and cleaner than the man-ape, moved slowly and tranquilly. In marked contrast their masters danced about uttering fearful cries of anger when anything interrupted their progress. They carried lancewood poles, armed with sharp, steel points, and with these cruel instruments vented rage for the results of their own stupidity, on the helpless animals, by prodding them till the blood ran down their flanks.

Dawn arrived before the man-ape succeeded in raising my trunk from the ground. At length they had me suspended, in beautiful balance, by a chain wound about the steel axle. Then, with a long and loud shout of command, they urged the powerful beasts forward, and I began a journey that was to take me out of the forest and to the remotest parts of the world. Rubyhead was perched above me, looking at me wistfully, but neither of us spoke. Then as the foliage closed behind me, dear little Rubyhead passed out of my life forever.

The giant wheels crashed against trees, exciting the man-ape's rage. They rode over stumps, or blocks of coral limestone cleaving them asunder with sparks of fire from the iron tires. Presently the road improved, the oxen moved forward steadily and the man-apes, shouldering their goads, walked along contentedly. Tall grass, sparkling with dew contrasted with the

dark-red dust of our pathway. We passed huts, built roughly from the forest trees and covered with palm leaves, primitive dwellings like those of Viajagua, the leaf-cutting ant, but on a much larger scale. At last the sparkling sea appeared and Virazon swept its cool, salt breath over the burning road. At the border of a river, not far from the ocean, the man-apes loosened the chain that held me and I rested once more on the ground.

Days and weeks passed in monotonous succession. The pile of logs grew ever larger but I had a place apart from the others. . . . What is it that now causes the man-ape to gaze seaward and shout to his companions? And whence comes this monster bird with great white wings? Is this some invention of the man-ape that compels the wind to drive it through waves and storm? . . . Excited chatter as the ship arrives. The rolling of barrels and the carrying of great boxes of merchandise. Exchange of greetings and messages and the strange grasping of their forepaws, attended with a ceaseless chatter . . . the pile of logs has now disappeared. The man-ape drives the teeth of steel tongs deep into my bark and sapwood. They turn a winch and by means of steel cables the contemptible and puny man-ape lifts mighty Caoba from the ground, and places him on the ship's deck. How can this weakest of all animals, through his inventions, become stronger than any?

The sea sparkled in moonlight. Snowy sails urged the vessel through the water and the heaving ground-swell told of distant storms on the great Caribbean. Northward the surf boomed against a rocky coast and the leaping spray appeared like ghostly forms dancing before the dark curtain of forest. Terral, the night wind, sweeping off the land brought the sweet fragrance of Sarsa flowers over the salt sea. Perhaps this scented air had but recently passed above the very part of the forest where I had spent so many happy years. My thoughts were filled with sadness as I looked back on events that were now part of the irrevocable past.

Cassiopeia and the Great Bear swing round their endless courses and mark the gliding hours. The lone man-ape who is left to guide and guard the ship, sits huddled against the helm, shivering in the damp night-wind. From time to time he stirs the charcoal fire and the sparks fly upward through the darkness. Anon he sings a plaintive air, a wild, barbaric melody in minor key. The refrain tells of some one,

"Cogiendo flores, de mil colores,
Estàn para mi, estàn para mi."

O thou poor, pitiable man-ape that dost pour forth thine innermost sorrows and vain longings to the silent night! Who knows if thou shalt ever hold her hands in thy hands or even see that loved one of thy dream visions! Or shalt thou ever gaze upon those

many-hued flowers which she gathers for thee? Why dost thou not raise thine unseeing eyes and try to behold those myriad, gleaming flowers with which God has strewn the sky above thy stupid head?

Dawn mantles the east. The stars melt, and day's harbinger appears, for one brief moment as a fiery star itself, that would burn the sea, then a line of flame which expands into a globe of gold. As a god he rises from the sea and ascends to his throne in the sky. Dawn and day came to the vast ocean even as I had known it to do so many thousands of times in the forest. Yet it was different from other dawns, for now it was the level border of the sea that cut the sun's disc and not the ragged edge of the forest roof. I thought with pleasure, tinged with sadness, of little Rubyhead and recalled his "infinite straight lines" and his "endless horizons."

The glassy sea is a mirror under the burning calm. The sailors cry aloud to San Antonio that he may send a favoring breeze, but San Antonio is deaf to their prayers because, forsooth, it is not time for the wind to blow. The sails and rigging cast no shadows under the vertical sun, whose rays strike the glassy water, and are lost in the tremulous and crystal depths of ocean. Nor does the man-ape look down in wonder at those fathomless depths of ultramarine, even as he did not raise his eyes to the twinkling stars of yesternight. . . . suddenly, on the southern hori-

zon there appears a long line of dark blue. Catspaws, like radiant fans of air, strike the water and a joyful cry of "la virazon, la virazon!" arises from the sailors, as the heaving, ground-swells are crested with hissing foam. The sun has, at length, commanded the ocean air to cool the heated land, and so San Antonio has granted the sailors' prayers. The ship's cordage shrieks in the rising wind, leagues roll by, and presently, there seems to rise out of the water a great city, with towers and mighty edifices. Before the city there was a fleet of vessels from every part of the world. One of them was destined to bear me to far distant lands.

Unending night. Not the perfumed glory of the forest, star-laden and mysteriously beautiful, but an impatient night of dead and stagnant air, begun with no flaming twilight, ended with no rosy dawn. In place of chirping crickets and nocturnal voices no sounds come here but the grinding of ponderous machinery and the sharp, harsh cries of the man-ape. Are they shouts of command, or are they shrieks of terror? For the great ship heaves on the bosom of storm. It must be that we are at the mercy of an angry sea whose great surges sweep their green waters over the ship's decks from time to time. Unseen by Caoba, only dimly felt through shocks and tremors, this contest raged between the rude forces of nature and the man-ape's inventions. For the first time in my life I wanted the man-ape to win. I

"The gold which shines in the tremulous
path of sunset on a tropic sea"

"The gold which shines in the tremulous path of sunset on a tropic sea"



was heart and soul with this creature whom I had always regarded as my enemy. So, as the ship, after each great shock, gathered momentum to cleave the oncoming wave, it seemed that I too, moved and strained with it, and that I trembled in sympathy with the terrifying vibrations of the struggling engines. The man-ape must conquer! Caoba must conquer! O that I could help the man-ape! What if he fails and the ship founders? What if it should sink into the black and icy death of ocean's bottomless caverns, and Caoba, his message undelivered, is doomed to rest forever in cold and eternal night, glared at by peering eyes of misshapen sea monsters in their phosphorescent glow!

But fate led me along fairer lines. The broad seas were crossed at length and I came to a city of a gloomy, northern land, where, in the smoke-laden air, the promise of dawn never came to the fullness of day. There I was carried through narrow streets filled with vehicles loaded with merchandize from all parts of the world. Sold at auction for a fabulous price, I again crossed the sea and came to a land white with snow. Here the slanting sun in the blue sky seemed powerless to temper the biting air, the man-ape was clad in the furs of animals, and his breath rose from his mouth like morning mist of the Cienaga. I was taken to a great mill, filled with all kinds of machinery, where my weight and size were of little moment in presence of forces which the man-

ape had trained to do his will. In this place every kind of fragrant and beautiful wood was being cut and sawn to serve their peculiar kinds of usefulness. When my turn came to pass under the whirring saws, there were present a number of the man-apes, who gave directions to use the greatest care and judgment in handling me. When the first cutting was made, and my wood was revealed to the light of day, their faces were filled with expressions of happiness, for then they knew that their courage in paying a fortune for me had been vindicated. With patience and skill my wood was sawn into thin veneer and I was guarded with jealous care in a warehouse where merchants and buyers from all parts of the world examined me. So I was sent to architects, and builders, and makers of fine furniture, and my thin wood was cemented to skilfully-made foundations of wood, and submitted to tremendous pressure, till I became solid and capable of resisting whatever forces I might have to encounter. Finally my surface was sanded and polished and rubbed by the palms of the man-ape which were soft and warm, like those of Jutia the tree-rat, only very much larger.

THE MAN-APE TELLS WHAT HE KNOWS OF CAOBA

From that fateful day when I fell in the forest, till I awoke, reincarnate, in the palaces of kings, in noble halls where laws are made for empires, in great libraries, and in the homes of those strange beings with whom I was now to live, my adventures seemed unreal and phantomlike, as though they had been dreams rather than actions.

But now a new power to realize these experiences, so different from those of the forest, came to me as my wood was disclosed to the light of day. On pathways of shining steel I traversed mountains and plains. In palatial steamers I crossed oceans and conquered their raging storms; in wonderful inventions of musical instruments, my soul vibrated to the harmonies of great symphonies; amid soaring arches and pillars of stone, I looked on mighty works of architecture and to their rude strength I lent soft colors that were stolen from the forest.

Though my wood is now separated and sent to far distant lands, my identity remains unchanged, each part bound to every other by unseen and unheard

messages, no less mysterious than the Voices of the Forest. Through long years of growth, the wonder-life of the wilderness had been absorbed and fused through each and every part of me, even to my branches now moldering in the forest and my roots still embracing the coral rocks of the ancient sea-bed which was my former home. In my new environment I learned surprising things of the man-ape. I saw him when, surrounded by numbers of his own kind, all his natural impulses were repressed; I saw him in solitude when the evil of his worse than Satanic nature, no less than his rarer flashes of almost divine glory were clearly revealed. I have witnessed the secret transactions of those who were betraying their country for gold; I have seen woman's honor bartered for kingdoms; in dark night I have heard footsteps of the stealthy thief and have been spattered with the blood of foul murders. Yet, again, I have been thrilled with great renunciations, and deeds of heroism, of which the world will never know.

Among my experiences in the homes of the man-ape there was one in which I had opportunity to learn many things hitherto unknown about myself. This took place at a lecture on the subject of "The Mahogany Tree," at a noted university and before a distinguished gathering. I was present in the wood of a beautiful library table, round which many of the man-apes were seated. They were mostly venerable, wore large-rimmed spectacles and reminded me in many respects of a group of funeral attendants.

Presently, one who had a place at the head of the table, rose and addressed the meeting as follows:—"I am very glad to announce that we have present with us today one of the world's most celebrated authorities on tropical woods. The eminent scientist who is to address us has devoted the greater part of his life to study of this subject and has given special attention to the mahogany tree. I feel sure that we shall listen to Professor Dullape with profound interest while he discusses this absorbing subject."

Thereupon a short, and rather thin, man-ape, whose shoulders were stooping as a result of age and study, rose, and after wiping his spectacles, began to speak as follows,—"I do not have to tell you how highly honored I feel at having an opportunity of addressing this very intelligent audience. It is quite probable that in no other university of the world would it be possible to gather together an equal number of men celebrated for learning and scientific attainments. By good fortune we have before us, in this magnificent table, an exceptionally fine example of Cuban mahogany. Some of you may recall that not many years ago a mahogany log was shipped to Liverpool which so far surpassed the average for size, and quality of its figured wood, that it was bought for a fabulous price and shipped to New York. This log when cut into veneer realized a small fortune for its owner. Who knows but that this very table which justly arouses our utmost admiration, may not be made from the historic log of which I speak?"

With these introductory remarks he began a discourse on the mahogany tree. His lecture was far too long, and likewise too dull, to bear repetition but, in part, he spoke as follows,

"The mahogany, one of the most majestic trees of tropical America, finds its natural home on the borders of the Caribbean Sea. True mahogany is not found anywhere in the world outside of those countries which touch this Mediterranean of the western hemisphere, that is to say, the West Indies, Florida, Mexico, Central America, and the extreme northern part of South America. This wood was discovered in the West Indies by the early Spanish navigators and is first mentioned as having been used by them in 1521. Sir Walter Raleigh used mahogany in 1597 to repair his ships. Its natural beauty soon made it much appreciated as a cabinet wood and it was so used in England in 1724. But shipbuilders were those who first took advantage of this new-world timber and to such an extent that English importations in 1846 reached the astounding figure of eighty-five million board feet. Since that time consumption has diminished owing to partial exhaustion of the forests. As the wood became scarcer, large sailing vessels which had been built with mahogany framework, were sold for incredible prices and made into furniture.

"The botanical name, *Swietenia mahagoni*, was given in 1670 by the celebrated Dutch botanist, Jacquin, in honor of Baron von Swieten, physician to Maria Theresa. The name, *mahagoni*, is probably

derived from a dialect of Florida. The Spanish name *Caoba*, is undoubtedly of Carib origin. The mahogany tree often attains a diameter of four to six feet and a height of from eighty to one hundred feet. In Mexico it reaches its greatest size and abundance, but generally speaking, it is a tree of solitary growth. A hard and rocky soil, with consequent slow growth, produces the best wood, and this is particularly true of mahogany from Florida, Santo Domingo and Cuba, which is the finest in the world.

"Of all kinds of timber, mahogany shows the greatest variety in quality. Experts, however, can distinguish the exact place where it is grown by the texture of its wood, which though moderately hard is capable of taking a lasting polish and does not warp or check easily. These qualities make it invaluable for interior finish of public buildings, banks, and offices, no less than for the construction of pianofortes, surveying instruments and delicate scientific apparatus. When highly figured it is the most valuable cabinet wood known. Figured logs have sold for as much as four, or even five, thousand dollars. The finest and hardest grade of wood is sawn into thin sheets of veneer, about one twenty-fourth of an inch thick- and used for cabinet work. The softer wood from Mexico is steamed for a long time and sliced by large knives into sheets of paper thickness, but this is not esteemed so highly as the sawn veneer. The color of the wood, when first cut, is pale rose or pink but on exposure to light turns in a short time to a deep,

reddish-brown. In this way, objects resting on the fresh cut wood, when exposed for a few days to the sun, are reproduced as in silhouettes.

"Owing to the unusual qualities of mahogany wood, and the gradual exhaustion of the accessible supply, a large number of substitutes have been introduced by timber merchants in recent years. The wood from more than sixty different species of trees is now sold under the name of 'mahogany', such as, for instance, 'Brazilian,' 'African,' and 'Philippine' mahogany. Less than half of these belong to the mahogany family and the majority are not even remotely related to it."

Thus spoke the sapient man-ape. As the lecture came to a close my mind was confused at the maze of incongruous statements that had been droned out at such weary length. Moreover I was filled with disappointment that the learned professor had been at such pains to say things, which, whether true or no, were entirely uninteresting. As a general rule the man-ape has no hesitation in telling lies provided they are interesting ones, but this whole discourse had been full of half-truths and falsehood, without even that merit. Moreover, I was amazed that a group of creatures, presumably the most intelligent in the world, as they themselves were willing to admit, should tolerate such a one-sided and narrow presentation of the subject. For there was not one word in the entire lecture that referred to Caoba's ancient ancestry nor was there any reference to the

qualities of his wood, except as they directly affected the selfish interests of the man-ape. And then, when he said that the mahogany tree was first discovered about four hundred years ago, I thought that surely the man-ape had gone mad, or else, forsooth, this gathering and this lecture were all a dream.

O incredible and well-nigh infinite egotism of the man-ape! Did not Caoba lend you aid in the dark forest in those dim ages when you used to run, shrieking with terror, from your enemies and from the quarrelsome members of your own family? Did not Caoba's massive branches offer you protection and a home? Did not Caoba pity your trembling and your ugliness and save you from endless forest dangers? And now, after the passing ages, in your new homes built as they are, to this day, from the forest trees, and in your new environment, have you forgotten old friends?

So I was disturbed by a multitude of opposing thoughts, even as when, in a storm at sea, violent and changing winds have set waves and currents in tumultuous warfare. If, for one moment, I had lost that sense of dignity with which my ancestry and life-long training had so richly endowed me, my heart surely would have been filled with contempt and indignation. But those seeds of discontent took no root in me, for I had gazed too long at the stars and clouds and the wonders of the forest.

Yet I felt both anxiety and fear as to the impending

fate of the aged professor. I pitied him from the bottom of my heart as I thought of the pent-up wrath and scorn of his outraged audience. Long since I had expected violent hands would have been laid on the imbecile who had so boldly dared to mock their intelligence. But as I waited expectant, during the momentary calm after he had finished his talk, my pity was suddenly turned to amazement. For, to my utmost surprise, in place of criticism and ridicule, the aged lecturer was greeted with wild applause and congratulations and even decorated with certain tokens of honor, that apparently had been made ready in advance, for this special occasion. And now for the first time I witnessed an interesting, and, to me, new, custom of the man-ape, who when he wishes to give evidence of admiration, beats his fore-paws together, thereby making a peculiar sound, unlike any other in nature, unless it be the crackling of dry brush and thorns in a hot fire.

CAOBA TELLS WHAT HE KNOWS ABOUT THE MAN-APE

During dark night-watches the man-ape dreams. Often I have heard him moan and have seen him toss in restless sleep, when pale visions, usually of pain, and but rarely of gladness, glide in disorder before his half-waking consciousness. I have learned from his day-time chatter that such dreams often recall events of waking hours, not as true pictures, but rather as strange and distorted transformations of them, even as a composer of some great symphony, weaves from an original theme a complex design through varied keys and tempos. It may have been that contact with the man-ape's life and experiences in his most intimate environment had so strongly influenced me as to control my own dreams. An occurrence of that very night made me think this might be possible.

The audience had long since departed and voices no longer echoed in the hall where I had heard such bewildering statements about myself. At length the caretaker extinguished the lights, and night cast its spell over the deserted room. No sound disturbed

the otherwise perfect silence except the occasional cracking of some bit of furniture in the dry heat, or the rhythmic ticking of the clock. Nor was there anything to remind me of my former life in the forest, yet it must have been that I dreamed a dream after the fashion of the man-ape. I thought I was again in my former home and my heart was filled with joy. As of yore I sensed the perfume of flowers and felt the sea-breeze rustling amid the leaves and I listened to Cao and Cotorra chattering, and there, too, was little Rubyhead flitting through the sapphire sky. And such sweet wilderness music, soothing and sensuous, made me wish nevermore to leave this place where God had so intimately revealed Himself. Yet this was not quite the forest as I had known it, where Caoba grows solitary and apart, but there were many noble trees, almost all of which were of Caoba's family. Whether these aged rulers of the forest had always lived here, or had assembled for some special purpose, I knew not, nor did I make inquiry. The man-ape, in his dreams never questions the most grotesque or absurd situations, for, when sleeping, his reasoning powers are dead and an all-believing god rules his soul. In my dream likewise, modelled after that of the man-ape, it was not for me to trespass on his habits or the customs of his domain and I accepted, accordingly, the strangest circumstances as the most natural in the world.

In the beginning of my dream there was great excitement over an unusual incident that had recently

occurred. It seemed that a man-ape had lost his way in the wilderness, a few days previously, and had died of starvation in this very place. As silence fell on the assembly my attention was drawn to one of the largest and most venerable of the Caobas. While some of his upper branches had been broken, long since, by storm winds the others, growing irregularly, gave him an aged and stooped appearance. Yet, for all that, he was apparently a leader amongst his fellows, and it began to dawn on me that they were assembled here to listen to some discourse from him. Forthwith the aged Caoba began to speak as follows:—

"My friends, we have for discussion today a most interesting subject, a subject, in fact, that concerns each and every one of us in a vital way, even to the very life and death of the forest itself. I refer, as you know, to the man-ape. By great good fortune, we have before us a magnificent specimen of this remarkable animal which but recently wandered into the wilderness and died here unable to procure food or find his way to safety. The forest permits no unclean thing, so Aura, the buzzard has already picked his bones, and if by chance he may have worked over-hastily, the ants and other insects have scoured and polished them till they gleam as you observe, like white corals on the salt sands of a tropic shore. You can readily see that his skeleton, bone for bone, resembles that of the wild dog, or deer, or even of Jutia the tree-rat. There are, of course, vari-

ations as in all other animals. For instance his hind legs are enormously lengthened. Moreover his head is round and so extraordinarily large that he must have a great deal of trouble in holding it up. He even has a rudimentary tail of four vertebræ, which, as you no doubt have already suspected, harks back to his primitive ancestry.

"The man-ape was originally discovered by Caoba several hundred thousand years ago, though no particular attention was paid, at that time, to the ugly and clumsy creature. Of all the forest animals he was the most quarrelsome and ill-natured, but as he was quite harmless, Caoba willingly gave him the shade and protection of his leaves and branches as he likewise did to the other forest life. Then, for long ages, Caoba and the man-ape saw little or nothing of one another, because, for reasons that will be clear to you later, this animal which had been protected by the forest, became independent of the forest, and wandered away to distant lands. Not long since, quite recently in fact, let us say thirty-five or forty thousand years ago, a wonderful event took place in the man-ape's history. Perhaps I can best make this clear to you by recalling certain things that you have learned from your own experience or from the Voices of the Forest. For instance, when birds first acquired the use of wings, they gained an enormous advantage, not only to avoid enemies but to find new sources of food, and they increased and prospered accordingly. Likewise, with all living

creatures, whenever a new adaptation to environment was discovered, the fortunate possessor made rapid gains on both friends and enemies. Now in the case of the man-ape, the critical event in his life which I have already mentioned was the more or less rapid acquisition of *intelligence*. Brain power, to the man-ape, was no less important than were fins and wings to fishes and birds. So, from being one of the most helpless of all creatures, he was transformed almost over-night, as it were, into the most powerful and dangerous member of the animal kingdom. Without claws or teeth to defend himself, he learned to use sticks or stones, and eventually, projectiles of the most deadly nature. With little natural protection from wet or cold he began to cover himself with the skins of other animals, or the woven fibers of plants which he fashioned into garments of curious and ingenious ornamentation. This gave him a great advantage, for now he could live in polar cold, as well as tropic heat. So he extended his habitat over the entire globe. But there was a disadvantage in wearing clothes because his skin, no longer cleansed and purified by sun and rain, had no protection except in a kind of covering to which his whole former life had been unaccustomed. As a result, he became infested with all kinds of parasites which were not only an annoyance in themselves but were conveyors of plagues and fevers to the man-apes which swept them to speedy death by hundreds of thousands.

"However, his brain was never idle. He discovered

the use of fire and made innumerable inventions. He learned the wonderful advantage of living in great masses so that each individual could become expert in doing one particular thing, and in this way the number and complexity of his devices almost passed the bounds of imagination. He began to live in comfort, and at length, in luxury. Alone and unaided, he is still the most helpless of all animals, as you will clearly understand when you consider the fate of this poor creature whose bones now lie before you. Though this individual was endowed with intelligence, he was unable to find his way through the wilderness. Yet the forest birds fly hundreds of leagues over sea and land and return every year to the same nesting places. Even in a place where all the forest creatures find abundance in nature's generous stores, this helpless man-ape was unable to find food and escape death by starvation.

"As to his life and habits, he has acquired the truly novel, and possibly unique, habit of walking, and even standing, on his hind legs, except in the case of the very youngest. These sprawl about on all fours, like any other animal, though far more clumsily. This habit of standing up, almost unknown among other animals, has caused their hind legs to develop enormously, with a consequent weakening of their fore legs. As it is, the exertion required to remain erect is so tiring that they have to spend a large part of their lives asleep, in order to repair this tremendous drain on their vitality.

"And now, my friends, we have arrived at the most interesting part of our talk and you may, perhaps, have to stretch your imaginations a little in order to follow me. The man-ape is, of all animals, the most destructive. It seems as if nature in her entirety must needs sacrifice herself for him. He pollutes the air with smoke and poisonous gases, so that in the dark winter months, neither the sun by day, nor the moon and stars by night, can penetrate the pall of gloom which lies over his great cities. He defiles rivers and lakes, killing their fish, and then he drinks the impure water and dies by thousands from fevers which arise from his own uncleanliness. He fills the flowery meadows with refuse, he blasts the mountains and cuts down the hillsides, he fells the forests, and what he cannot use he destroys by fire.

"You will recall one characteristic of the primitive man-ape when he used to climb into Caoba's branches for protection, and that was his habit of continually quarreling and fighting even with his nearest relatives. Since those early days the man-ape has advanced in many ways, but not along these lines. On the slightest of pretexts, or none at all, he still picks quarrels with his neighbors, or with adjoining tribes, and in the latter case he immediately sends out individuals selected from the strongest and youngest of the tribe to kill their new-found enemies. Owing to their ingenious and deadly inventions the number that die in this way is beyond belief. Then, after

untold thousands have fallen, those who have succeeded in doing the most destruction, instead of getting down on their knees before their gods and asking forgiveness, indulge in the wildest excesses, ringing bells, blowing whistles, dancing in the streets, or filling themselves with various drugs. When not engaged in destroying one another by whole nations, nothing delights them more than to arm themselves with guns, or cunningly devised inventions, and follow the streams or penetrate the forests with no other idea than to kill whatever form of life they may encounter, whether fish or birds, not necessarily for food, but often for the mere joy of killing.

"I know you will find it difficult to believe these things, especially as the law of the forest allows us to destroy life, only in self defense, or to avoid starvation. But, incredible as my statements are, I must now trespass still further on your indulgence. It seems that this remarkable creature, either through fear, or a sense of his own inefficiency, has conceived the idea of supernatural beings, called gods, who are believed to have the power of life or death over them, and whose favors must be sought and propitiated in all kinds of ways. As they can neither see nor hear these gods, they make images of them in painting or sculpture, in order to assist their imagination. Some of these are merely idealized figures of themselves, while others are terrifying and fearful distortions of animals, or other fantastic conceptions that far transcend the horrors of their wildest dreams. Each

tribe, in every part of the world, has its own special god, more or less different from every other. More remarkable still, each nation contends that its own is the only true god, while all others are false and worthless. In the varied relations of the man-ape to each other, and to distant tribes, nothing so fiercely stirs his wrath and indignation as to question the sanctity and worth of their particular gods. Over this subject they will fight for years and kill one another, in pitched battles, or midnight massacres, by tens of thousands. Again, in certain cases where they agree as to the general conception of their own god, they will quarrel over some minute detail, with regard to the manner of worship, or some such matter, and their hearts become filled in consequence with indescribable bitterness and hatred. When such a situation arises, whichever side happens to be the stronger, indulges in deeds of the utmost cruelty towards the weaker, tearing their victims limb from limb, by means of diabolical racks and machines of torture, boiling them in oil, or burning them at the stake, in order to make them believe things they do not believe. Such, my friends, is a brief sketch of the animal whose bones now lie before you and woe to the forest when he discovers it, as, like all else in nature, it will be doomed to destruction."

As the venerable Caoba ceased speaking, methought the sea-breeze began to blow gently, or if not, then it must have been that the assembled trees nodded their heads and waved their pendant plumes

in token of approval. Thereupon one of the eldest addressed the audience saying, "We have all listened with deep interest and admiration to the words of Caoba, and we have heard the astonishing story of the man-ape. It is now entirely proper that we should honor our learned friend in recognition of his great knowledge of this absorbing subject. With your consent, therefore, I suggest that we ask the Voices of the Forest to do us the favor of gathering two score of the rarest and most beautiful orchids, and as many of the longest plumes of Spanish moss, with which to decorate his branches, and so do him deserved honor."

While this was going forward my attention was called to an incident that now took place in a nearby part of the forest. Just a little to the north, there stood a group of young mahogany trees which, quite probably, were the offspring of the aged monarchs in whose company I had been spending, all so recently, such pleasant moments. Now the tallest of them, a slender youth of, perhaps, sixty-five or seventy years, who had just reached the forest top and felt very proud accordingly, addressed his companions:

"Caobitas, what think you of all this that the old fellow has been telling us about the man-ape?"

"It all seems a fairy tale to me," said one.

"I should rather call it pure nonsense," added another.

"I cannot believe," ventured a third, "that God

ever created an animal so stupid as to kill one another by thousands in pitched battles when they do not even know what they are fighting about."

"Nor to boil their victims in oil," said still another, "and tear them to pieces over some obscure conception of God."

But, by a remarkable coincidence, in the very midst of this conversation, Candelita, the redstart, arrived on his annual migration from the north. Now Candelita, who is also the "little flame," comes in countless thousands, and when he comes he fills the green woodland with a glory of orange fire. Forthwith all was excitement, and the Voices of the Forest called out;—"Tell us the latest word from the cold northland, O beautiful Candelita, thou brave and fearless messenger!"

Candelita:—"The man-ape is killing, the man-ape is killing."

Voices of the Forest:—"In the northern land?"

Candelita:—"No. Far over the Ocean of Storm. The Smooth-Chatters and the Rough-Chatters are fighting, and the Hissing-Chatters have sent ships and vast forces also. Before beginning my journey southward, in that brief time which the crescent moon required to round out her silver orb, one hundred thousand of their best and bravest have fallen, and their mothers and little ones are starving."

Voices of the Forest:—"Surely there must have been world-redeeming cause for this dreadful slaughter."

To this Candelita made no reply. The venerable Caobas hung their pendant moss in the brooding calm, as if filled with sorrow. The young Caobitas, who had spoken with such bold assurance, were shame-faced. Even the Voices of the Forest were silent. And this unwonted hush, that fell upon the wood-land, seemed a solemn recognition of the man-ape's mighty failure. For what else but failure was the burden of this message? The forest knew, with mingled pride and humiliation, that the man-ape, though her potential enemy, was offspring of the forest. And this silence seemed also a requiem, not alone for the poor creature who had miserably perished in the wilderness through his own helpless-ness, but even more for those hundreds of thousands, nay millions, slain without apparent reason by the hand of his own kind, whose bones were whitening the plains and hills of that turbulent land across the Ocean of Storm.

The silence was broken as the first of the Voices of the Forest, who had been selected to honor Caoba, began to return from their errands. Cotorra brought the roots of a young orchid, which later would put forth a beautiful flower, and with his sharp claws he tucked it neatly down among the other plants on Caoba's branches. Aura arrived with a magnificent, epiphytic fern. Cao, bearing a long plume of Spanish moss, was barely able to finish his journey for his burden had caught on every tree and besides that it was far too heavy for him. And so, amid

the awe and wonder, and withal the approval, of the woodland, the Voices of the Forest began to decorate with appropriate dignity, the aged Caoba in honor of his profound knowledge of the man-ape.

CAOBA WONDERS AT THE MAN-APE'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE NATURE

As the light of winter's dawn streamed through the library windows, announcing the birth of another day, I could not, at first, realize that I had dreamed a wonderful dream. Surely I had been living again, experiences of my woodland days. So clear were the details of that happy vision that I could not distinguish its unsubstantial quality from the true happenings of yesterday; I mean the aged professor's lecture, his strange statements about the mahogany tree and the enthusiastic applause that greeted his pitiful efforts. Which was dream and which reality? Or had they both been dreams?

Yet here was all the stately furniture as of yore. Here was the same old clock that had been ticking through the night,—tick-tock, tick-tock,—measuring the passing hours of the man-ape's sorrowful, but all too short life. Here also were the first arrivals for the day's work, some chattering as ever, others reading and resting their books and paws on my shining surface. To speak with all truth my heart was not in these places. Rather did it ever seek the wilder-

ness. There was no event or circumstance of day or night that did not suggest others of greater charm in the forest. Even the rhythmic ticking of the ancient clock, (beware, man-made clock that some rusty spring do not give way and silence you forever!) reminded me of that maze of celestial bodies which I called God's clock,—the constellations, the planets and ever-changing moon,—forever circling the pole. Gaze on them one moment while they appear to stand motionless in the boundless space where God has placed them. Then pause, to admire the night-fog wreathing its spectral forms in the pale, nocturnal light, or to hear the raucous voice of swamp-birds as they fly over the forest roof, and now!—look again on the majestic face of heaven. Behold! the stars and constellations have moved a hairsbreadth, and by that hairsbreadth they have measured, in all silence, one tick-tock of eternity!

Though I saw the man-ape in every possible situation of his strange life and though I heard his chatter on every subject that concerned him, the more I studied his problem the less I understood. His realm is full of contradictions and complexity. In the forest a stern simplicity restrains all things. Caoba's leaves and flowers are everywhere alike. Here and there some individual tree may have larger leaves or more luxuriant foliage as a result, perhaps, of abundant moisture and rich soil, but its offspring, less favorably situated, soon reverts to the general type.

No such rules guide the man-ape's life. His diversity of race, language and customs, did not so much surprise me as the contrasting nature of individuals living in the same environment. I became acquainted with learned scientists who knew how to calculate the movement of stars and planets, to small fractions of a second, who discovered their inmost secrets and analyzed their very substance, even when their elements are unknown upon this great world of ours. Yet, in marked contrast, there were others who did not make use of those senses with which they had been endowed. Such would not admit the earth to be a globe, though God should throw the world's round shadow on the face of the eclipsed moon a hundred thousand times before their blind eyes!

I became acquainted also with individuals, to whose clear vision, the marvellous machinery of life, astounding in its wonders, was like an open book. And I knew their counterparts who could not see, much less understand, the subtle variations in all creatures, binding together remote forms of life by insensible gradations of size and color. These believe that the Creator, having once created, has abandoned the universe to its own devices. Unwittingly they deny to God the power to create in any other way than their feeble thoughts allow, lest nature, in her vast complexity, should outpace their dull and shallow minds.

This height of knowledge and depth of ignorance

were incomprehensible. But there was another feature of the man-ape which astonished me even more, and that was his overweening pride and egotism. There is no other creature with so little reason to be proud and withal so proud as he. It is not enough that he proclaims himself created in the image of God. He must needs fill all things and all places with his own glory. If he writes books they tell little else than his deeds of heroism or his conquests in love and war. If he writes dramas, the stage is filled with strutting figures who enact his glorious adventures. If he paints pictures, ten thousand of them, more likely than not, will be portraits of himself clad in gorgeous raiment, while only two or three, perchance, will depict the sunset, the forest shadows or the raging sea. He adorns architecture with heroic figures of his warriors in bronze and stone. He even dares to trespass on the sacred threshold of music, noblest of arts and most apart from the man-ape's life. And this highest art, which shyly utters its voice in the sighing wind, the purling brooklet and the winged songsters of the woodland, he has vainly tried to mold to his self-centered nature and make portray his trivial emotions.

So the man-ape feels certain that all things have been created for himself alone. Vast ages, in which the whirling globe teemed with life, were nothing but the preparation for his coming. Proud and insolent, he makes bold to say that *sound* itself, does not exist except it fall on human ear! O boundless

and insufferable effrontery, which nature herself must needs resent! Shall I, Caoba, permit him, unchallenged, to deny the voices that have cried out in the wilderness since time's beginning? Where was the man-ape when ocean first sought the caverns of her appointed realm, and her mighty surges thundered, as they thunder still, on cliffs and unknown shores where none has stood until this hour? Where was this master of the universe, when the leafy woodland was born, and when, above green forests, which stretched unbroken from the place of dawn to realms beyond the twilight, the voice of storm called to the trembling trees? Did not the mating birds sing sweet music through those ages? Was nature in all that time silent, and did she give forth no sound because, forsooth, vainglorious man-ape was not there to hear?

CAOBA IS RECONCILED TO THE MAN-APE

Fire, speech, and the printing press, are three great arches in the bridge that spans the gulf between ape and man. I often questioned whether this gulf had, as yet, been spanned. As I thought of this creature's pride and cruelty, his wonderful inventions, and almost divine attributes, I despaired of ever finding exit to this tangled maze of thought. It seemed a frightful thing that nature's supreme creation, this foster child of the forest, should come to so pitiful an end. When hope had all but faded that I should ever find true answer to this question, it seemed, one day, that I felt a mysterious message floating through my soul. It reminded me of my former life in the wilderness when some unseen Voice of the Forest tried to communicate with me. And this voice said to me, half in chiding: "Caoba, do you find the man-ape's nature beyond understanding? You, who through the years have gazed upon the forest's mysteries, have known the moving clouds, storms and lightning, and have peered into the sublime secrets of the stars? Is this creature's problem incomprehensible to mighty

Caoba,—Caoba, who is so much older than the childlike man-ape?"

And now, through this message, the answer flashed upon me. My soul was flooded with light even as is the woodland when, at daybreak, the short midsummer dawn announces night's ending and the sun, like a proud god, rises straight from the green horizon, flooding the forest with a golden glory. Again and again those pregnant words came to me, "*Caoba who is so much older than the childlike man-ape.*" I wondered why this solution had not been apparent long ago. For was I not millions of years older than the man-ape? Through unknown ages I had been Caoba, a tree perfected to almost the highest limit of its nature. And the man-ape?—only a few score thousand years had he been even so much as a man-ape. His mighty deeds had blinded me to the truth.

So, for the first time, I saw him for what he really was, merely the last name in nature's catalogue of new creations. He was, in fact, little more than earth's big baby, nursling of the universe! And there he sits, sprawled out on the floor of his nursery, whose borders are the ends of the great globe itself, and in his chubby hand he holds with pride a new-found toy whose name is *intelligence.* With this wondrous instrument he beats upon the floor and walls of his nursery, while the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, all nature's handiwork, in fact, stand around him in amazement and fear, wondering when and where he will strike next. Even the rivers fear him lest they

be turned from their courses and the mountains lest they be cut down and moved from their places.

I now saw reason for the man-ape's childishness, his crying and laughter, his pride, his destructiveness, his fickle and contrary nature. These strange beings, I know not whether most fortunate or most to be pitied of all God's creatures, were the battleground of ever contending forces. They were in the throes of a mighty surge of evolution, ever struggling forward and yet ever held back by the sodden mass of humanity. And what filled my soul with sorrow was to realize that the great majority of the race have their heads forever bowed down to the ground, worshipping the God of Utility, who is half-brother to the God of Ugliness. They live their placid and colorless lives, even as the cattle in their fields or the sheep on their hills, perfectly content with things as they are, bringing nothing into the world, leaving nothing behind them when they pass into the great beyond. For them, the beauty of God's presence has no meaning, and the wild rose of the wayside, the sunset's flaming color, or the songs of woodland birds appeal in vain to their blind eyes and deaf ears.

The man-ape had never shown himself a friend of Caoba, yet I felt a deep responsibility in this primitive child of the forest for I had protected him in the days of his helplessness. Even as a mother would feel pity and love for her deformed child, so my heart was not altogether hardened to the man-ape. Yet I was filled with fear for his future. Who was to

redeem him? Would he never lose his love for the commonplace; would he never overcome his lust for killing and destroying; for slander and envy? How could he succeed where, amid vast multitudes, were one to strive upwards, ten thousand were ready to pull him down again? Only among those who were supposed to be idealists and dreamers could I find any gleam of hope. These were the scientists and inventors who turn the secrets of nature to the welfare of their race; artists and sculptors, and portrayers of beautiful things; composers of great symphonies; architects who pierce the sky with poems wrought in steel and stone; heroes who sacrifice all, even to their lives, to discover the cause of disease that they may relieve suffering and replace despair with hope and joy. These and such as these are they who shall at length transform the man-ape to man-god.

This idea came to me on one occasion with extraordinary clearness. It was during a concert in a great hall where four or five thousand were assembled. Here an orchestra was grouped round a magnificent pianoforte, in whose top and sides my figured wood gleamed with the sunshine and shadow of the tropic forest. And I, who had listened with joy to the ever unfinished harmonies of the wilderness, welcomed this newer music, and my soul vibrated to its wondrous inspiration. In that all too-short half-hour which ensued, there occurred an event of greater importance than any in my life. I say this with all conviction, even as I review the great turning

points in my history: my dream consciousness as a seed in father's lofty branches; my whirling flight to earth and the putting forth of my earliest tender leaves, at whose strange shape I wondered; the horrors of my adventure with the monster worm, which threatened to devour me; the terrors of the hurricane, and father's death, and all my marvellous experiences during long years as a forest monarch, even to the time the man-ape discovered me and put an end to my empire.

At this glorious concert where at length I became reconciled to the man-ape, there came forth an artist, tall and fair, pale, and with slender hands, who took his place before the solo instrument. As he did so a great silence fell on the vast audience, because, if in that multitude there were any to whose ears music brought no message, they were hushed at the awe and wonder round them. As the orchestra finished its first introductory strains the artist began to play. And what he played was not a series of meaningless chords upon a lifeless instrument, but rather as though he were reincarnating before that great multitude, voices and visions that, with far-off gaze, he seemed to hear and see in the wilderness. At one time, with discordant harmonies, it seemed as though he were calling the spirit of ocean and that this music was indeed the Voice of the Sea, singing its unending wail of melancholy and of contending forces. Again, with appealing melodies that rose, clear and sweet, above the muted orchestra, it seemed that I

was borne to far distant lands where stands the perfumed forest and where joyful birds gave forth their songs of daybreak. I marvelled at this almost divine power, in those slender hands and agile fingers, to sway the emotions of that vast multitude and hold them in silence as of death itself. Was this the result of relentless work, and patience, through long years? Was this the fruit of endless hours of application often amid discouragement and bitter tears? Others there were who had made equal sacrifice of toil and pain and had reaped no harvest. Then I realized that not work alone, nor suffering, nor infinite perseverance, had brought this success, and, for the first time, there was unfolded to my vision the unbreakable bond that henceforth would unite Caoba and the man-ape through all eternity, and my heart was filled with indescribable joy. For I saw the nobility of those uplifters of the man-ape's race, who were to redeem the great mass of mediocrity, and I no less surely recognized the inspiration of this artist before me, who even yet held that great audience spellbound with his magic fire. In that moment of deepest feeling my heart was softened to the man-ape, though he had been my enemy and had destroyed my forest home. I became reconciled to him, and my heart yearned to him as to a brother, for now I clearly saw that each of us had brought into the world an ennobling message, different in origin, yet alike in purpose. As the wondrous music came to an end, and, for a moment, there was

continued silence, I cried out to him (the voice of Caoba is as the south wind in the woodland) and I said:

"Nevermore, shall I call thee, and all such as thou art, man-ape, no, nor man either, but *man-god*, for even as Caoba, thou hast heard the Great Voices and hast seen the Great Visions! Even now I hear the Voices of the Forest as they bear messages from those sources of thine, all but divine, inspiration, and I know that thou, too, must hear them! Listen, man-god:—

The Voice of Thunder

"From dark clouds, O man-god, thou hast heard the Voice of Thunder, and it has filled thy heart, not with fear, but with wonder at the majesty of storm."

The Voice of Song Birds

"Thou hast heard the Voice of Song Birds, oldest of music, yet forever the newest, in undying melodies which melt into the forest's eternal song. When thou speakest thy sublime message these are the voices which inspire thine inmost soul."

The Voice of the Sea

"Ofttimes hast thou stood, O man-god, wind-swept and torn, on the shores of tumultuous ocean. Wet with her salt spray, thou didst thrill with divine fire, thinking to hear, not alone sea's awesome voice, but another that rose above her thunder, and brought tears to thine eyes, a voice as though the stars were calling one to another."

The Voice of the Wind

"The wind sounds sweet to thee as it bears forest perfume through sunlit skies. This gentlest and yet greatest of all voices alone is *invisible.* For the rolling thunder reveals itself in the lightning's streaming fire, the singing birds gladden thine eyes with color, and as for the moaning sea, does she not also tire thy gaze as she stretches her broad borders to remotest lands? But, neither on the rippling pool, nor amid the swaying trees, nor in the billowing prairie grass, has any eye the power to disclose the spirit of the moving wind. And when, in half-silent mystery, she softly touches the white pine of the mountain side, this greatest of voices makes thy soul to tremble, for this, in very truth, is the *Voice of God.*"

The Vision of the Sea

"The watery plain which is the Vision of the Sea, separating continents, yet binding empires together, calls thee with resistless power. In dreams thy gaze has traversed, even as the tireless seabirds, her myriad-leagued and lonely wastes, and from those endless voyages of fantasy thy soul has returned with new strength."

The Vision of the Mountains

"In shimmering heat of mid-summer deserts, thou hast seen the Vision of the Mountains, from afar. And on their summits, thou hast looked down at dread abysses, where retreating ridges carry the eye through the haze of blue infinities. Neither biting sting of gale-driven sleet, nor deadening cold, nor

beetling crag, above the airy depth where misplaced hand or foot meant instant death, had power to deny thee this noblest of God's visions."

The Vision of the Clouds

"Thou hast stood unafraid in the halls of lightning, where float misty clouds, and where dark storms build their awful forms. There does thunder answer the sun, as he darts his fiery beams through showers of hail and snow. There, also, in the slanting glory of dying day, thou alone, of all the world blind to these wonders, hast seen fair Iris, the rainbow goddess, come forth from her palaces of carmine and opal, to cast her colored arch on shower-dimmed clouds."

The Vision of the Stars

"Untold times have the stars held thee, spellbound in cold and icy night. Yet not even thou, O man-god, hast found strength to know this greatest of visions which alone is *silent.* For, though immeasurable ocean never cease her raging; nor mountains to echo forth their foaming torrents; nor thunder to call the storm clouds; from out that speechless void which separates the stars, there comes no sound, nor is there any voice to tell this majesty of things unthinkable, of boundless space, and of endless time, for this, in very truth, is the *Vision of the Face of God!*"

THE END



